

The Concept of Knowledge
in Islam

*and its Implications for Education
in a Developing Country*

Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud

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Preface

The problem of epistemology in Islam and its relationship to the content and process of Muslim education is the subject of this study. It has been motivated by the fact that the Islamic revivalism unfolding in many parts of the world demands an educational system that conforms to Islam, for education in the Muslim countries today is a dualist system based on the secular weltanschauung of the West. This dualist system, providing for both the religious and the academic or professional stream in most, if not all, Muslim countries, has contributed to the development of religious scholars who are basically lost in modern knowledge on the one hand, and professionals and bureaucrats who are divorced from their own religio-moral heritage and aspiration on the other. Numerous attempts have been made in the last ten years to bridge the gap separating these two powerful groups by proposing an integrated concept of education based on Islam.

The first attempt to discuss these matters at the *umma* level was done in the First World Conference on Islamic Education held in the Holy City of Mecca in 1977 where 313 Muslim scholars from all parts of the world participated. Since then three other world conferences have been held in other Muslim cities. Important literature has emerged as a result of these conferences, such as *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (ed. Prof. S.M.N. al-Attas, 1979), which contains papers delivered at the First World Conference, and *Educational Theory: a Quranic Outlook* (A.R.S. Abdullah, 1982), an attempt at integrating

modern educational concepts and practices with Islamic ideas. But there are still no systematic studies of the concept of knowledge from the normative Islamic perspective and its implications on a modern national education system. The early work of Prof. A. L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Tradition and Modernization into the Arab National System* (1972), is a good description of the process of educational modernization, not Islamization.

This book is thus a humble attempt to fill the gap, perhaps the only attempt so far to relate the role and concept of knowledge in Islam directly to a specific national system of education. I start by formulating the weltanschauung of Islam from which the role and concept of knowledge are subsequently derived. The notion of normative Islam is based almost wholly on its two fundamental sources: the Quran and the authentic *Sunna* interpreted in a unitary and systematic manner. The vehicle of the *Sunna* is the *hadith* collection and the history of Muhammad. The utilization of other sources, whether from Islamic traditions or Western civilization, is made only to strengthen the positions and the arguments derived from the basic sources.

The Malaysian sources are based primarily on government documents and publications, and discussions with officials. Newspaper reports, which in Malaysia are part of the governmental machinery, have also been used. Information concerning the Islamic groups is based on personal observation gained by my attending their programmes and discussions with some of their leaders and members. I hope that this work will contribute in some small way to the understanding of an Islamic world-view and its epistemology and their relationship to a modern Muslim educational system. In addition I have also tried to provide a brief description of the current attempts by concerned Muslim intellectuals on the issues of Islamic education.

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1

The Quran and the Prophet Muhammad

The Muslims regard the Quran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad as their primary sources for knowledge and guidance. Since this book seeks to examine the concept of knowledge in Islam and its implications for a Muslim educational system, an elucidation of a methodology of hermeneutics of these two sources is necessary. From this should emerge an Islamic weltanschauung with the utilization of the Quran and *Sunna* as sources of knowledge. In this introduction I shall deal with two problems. The first concerns a rational demonstration of the divine origin of the Quran, which is necessary as this claim forms the most fundamental aspect of its authority. The authority of Muhammad as an expositor and example *par excellence* of this Message, whose conduct (*Sunna*) is considered normative for Muslims, follows logically from the Quranic dicta. Secondly, a framework of hermeneutics of the Quran and the *Sunna* needs to be articulated to make the doctrines and the world-view of Islam as coherent as possible because both Muslims and non-Muslims have followed different methods in trying to understand the two basic sources.

The Divine Origin of the Quran

There is no direct empirical proof that the Quran comes directly from God, except from the pages of the Quran itself. On the other hand, there is also no proof that the Quran was fabricated by Muhammad; the com-

elling sincerity of the Quran rebuts this suggestion. Neither is there any proof that it is *not* from God; unless it could be proved that God should turn out to be non-existent. The non-existence of God is also an unproven thesis which is as invalid as the idea that there is no life after death. However, it is possible to demonstrate rationally from historical evidence that neither Muhammad nor any other human being composed the Quran and then passed it off as divine revelation.

Firstly, the Quran itself challenges the doubters at six different places concerning its divine origin.¹ The Quran invited doubters to find discrepancies in its message and content (4:82) or to produce ten *suras* (11:13-14) or one like it (2:23-4; 10:38) with the help of all mankind and *jinn*. Obviously, the Quran remains the ultimate achievement in the Arabic language. This inimitability is considered by Muslims as a major argument for its divine origin. A. J. Arberry writes:

the challenge was taken up during Muhammad's lifetime, and the surviving specimens of emulation do nothing to undermine the Koran's claim to inimitability; neither do the crude parodies put out by later writers, among them eminent authors, who feigned to rival the unique beauty of the Muslim Scriptures.²

The Prophet's opponents, as can be seen from the internal evidence of the Quran and from history, could not challenge the eloquence and the spiritual-moral content of the Quran. Early Muslim history describes the intrigue of some Meccan elites, led by al-Walid b. al-Mughira, to discredit the Quranic message as 'sorcery'.³ This is pointed to in one of the earliest chapters of the Quran as follows:

Behold [When Our messages are conveyed] he [i.e., al-Walid] reflects and meditates (as to how to disprove them)—and thus he destroys himself, and the way he meditates: yea, he destroys himself, the way he meditates—and then he looks [around for new arguments] and then he frowns and glares and in the end he turns his back [on Our messages], and glories in his arrogance and says: All this is mere sorcery handed down [from olden times]). This is nothing but the words of mortal man!⁴

Secondly, the assumption that the Quran is Muhammad's own conscious literary production is not sustainable on several grounds. He was known long before his call as a trustworthy man *Al-Amin* but

he was never known to recite or write literary works or poetry. Arberry has also pointed out that, granting the above assumption, it would be very 'difficult to find another case in which the literary expression of a man differed so fundamentally from his ordinary speech'.⁵ This distinction between the Quran and the ordinary words of Muhammad has been persistently and effectively maintained by Muslims. All Muslims, despite diverse intellectual trends and persuasions, unanimously uphold the divine status of the Quran while they differ significantly on *hadith*, the ordinary statements of Muhammad. The Mutazilites rejected much of the *hadith* while the Shiites have their own *hadith* corpus, to the vehement opposition of the Sunni majority. Even the Prophet himself and his close companions tried to ensure that the Quran and the *hadith* were not mixed.⁶

Thirdly, the attitude of the Prophet towards the Quran should be considered. Muhammad not only revered the verses of the Quran by firstly reciting the prayer *A'uzu bil-Lah min al-shaytan al-rajim* (I seek refuge in God from the wretched Satan) and *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (In the name of Allah the Most Merciful, Most Beneficent) before any recitation of the Quran, but he also tirelessly and constantly recited the verses on all occasions in public and in private. If the Quran had been his own creation it is highly unlikely that he would have continued to do this; he would not have needed to read his own verses in the privacy of his own home to seek guidance and strength. He was known to spend a large portion of the night in prayer reciting the Quranic verses and often times weeping profusely—a practice not uncommon among many pious Muslims even today.

Fourthly, the disjointed and multithematic yet consistent and coherent nature of the verses which, from the earliest times, were understood within their specific socio-historical contexts is proof that the Quran could not have been authored by a human mind. A writer would strive hard to present an organized and continuous flow of thought, and the results would, in all likelihood—if he/she were to write sporadically in different emotionally charged situations within a span of twenty-three years—be full of contradictions and inconsistencies and not make an intelligible whole. On the other hand, the disjointed and historically discrete nature of the Quranic passages provide a permanent source of guidance and reference for the Muslims' understanding and application.

Even the statements of the Quran on natural and scientific topics have been accepted by all Muslims and further vindicated by modern writers, even though many of the points concerning science and the

universe have only recently been supported by modern scientific discoveries.⁷ Many traditional Muslim *ulama*, such as Ibn Khaldun and Shah Waliy Allah for example, would accept all the statements of the Quran including those on natural and medical subjects (such as the benefits of honey), but would reject the efficacy of traditional medicine. Their main argument is that the Prophet's knowledge on these subjects is not based on revelation, but on contemporary experience.⁸

Fifthly, the Quranic inclusion of Muhammad's frailties and humanness do not accord well with the attitude of a person who wished to claim access to divine knowledge or divine inspiration. He would surely not have purposely revealed his human tendencies and frailties to the public if that had been the case. The Quran criticizes some of Muhammad's actions in several places (e.g. 80:1-5) and in others it warns him against corrupting the divine message (e.g. 17:33-75).

Lastly, the Quran, despite having verses with numerous overlapping terms and phrases, remains the only book that is easily memorized either partly or totally. Many Muslims who do not even understand the language of the Quran itself memorize it entirely by heart. The Quran has directly shaped and will continue to shape Muslim history. Muslims will continue to use it for guidance and inspiration. The Quran itself has issued a challenge to its detractors to produce a better guide:

Say [O Muhammad]: Produce then [another] revelation from God which would offer a better guidance than these two [i.e. the Torah and the Quran]—[and] I shall follow it, if you speak the truth (28:49).

It is thus clear that neither, Muhammad nor any other human being could have produced a work such as the Quran. It is divine.

Methodology of Islamic Hermeneutics

Since the two primary sources of the Islamic world-view and knowledge are the Quran and the *Sunna* of Prophet Muhammad, and since both of them were intricately connected with the historical struggle of the Prophet and the earliest Muslim community, a proper hermeneutics of these basic sources of Islam is fundamentally important to enable Muslims understand and apply their values, principles, and injunctions.

A proper interpretation of the Quran and the *Sunna* has been impor-

tant to Muslims from the earliest times. The existence of different schools of Islamic law and theology results from the different methods concerning the interpretation of these sources.⁹ Their methods are elaborate and systematic but there have been some important deviations from the teaching of the Quran and *Sunna* when taken as a unitary whole. The deviations have been caused primarily by the lack of a comprehensive and systematic articulation of the Islamic world-view.¹⁰ The unsystematic but deeply religious world-view—upon which the legal and intellectual developments was based—was caused, in turn, by the political controversies that almost destroyed the Islamic community barely half a century after the death of the Prophet. A significant amount of thought at this time, particularly theological thought, if not wholly determined by the socio-historical circumstances was at least a reflection of these developments.¹¹ It is in this context that the approach to the discipline of the sociology of knowledge is useful in our understanding of Islamic sources and thought. It must be noted that the method described in these pages is not totally independent of that of the classical scholars; some elements of their approaches are incorporated here but with certain major modifications. These are, for example, the utilization of philological and semantic analysis, and the 'occasions of revelation' (*asbab al-nuzul*).

Classical interpreters of the Quran used grammatical and philological analysis but this did not lead to an integrated approach because they did not use cross-references. The lack of cross-references can perhaps be explained by their disjointed or atomistic treatment of the Quranic verses due to the different occasions of revelations of these verses.¹² In a way, it could be said that the common use of *asbab al-nuzul* which isolates many verses partly explains why a total and coherent presentation of Islamic or Quranic weltanschauung based on the analysis of the semantic fields of the key Islamic concepts as they developed historically was not forthcoming. A few scholars did, however, analyse several Islamic concepts comprehensively, although this did not constitute an overall scheme of Quranic interpretation.¹³ The identification of the most important Islamic concepts can be achieved without much difficulty by a careful study of the Quran along with the historic struggle of the Prophet. The frequency of certain concepts provides, in general, a valid indication of their importance in the Islamic weltanschauung.¹⁴

It must be emphasized that semantic analysis alone is not enough for the total comprehension of Islamic values and injunctions. It can

provide only a general conceptual understanding which is instrumental for the articulation of a world-view, but specific meanings of injunctions and laws of a ritual or social nature must be understood in their socio-historical context or background.

To a certain extent, Muslims were forerunners in the discipline of the sociology of knowledge when they placed a high priority on the importance of 'occasions of revelation' in the understanding of the Quranic legal injunctions. For example, the scholar al-Wahidi (d. 1075 AD) wrote: 'The knowledge about the *tafsir* of the *ayat* is not possible without occupying oneself with their stories and explanations of [the reasons] for their revelation.'¹⁵ The *asbab al-nuzul* will help us to understand the direct meaning and application of the verse within its general context as well the reasons underlying legal rulings. They also help us discern the intent of the verses together with the specific or general meaning, and provide a good account of the various developments in the earliest Muslim community under the Prophet.¹⁶ The limitation of semantic and grammatical analysis and the importance of socio-historical background can be seen from the following examples. In verse 2:115 the Quran says: 'To God belongs the East and the West: Whithersoever ye turn, there is the presence of God, for God is All Pervading, All Knowing.' It would be semantically correct and it would accord well with the general weltanschauung of Islam to infer from this verse that God is not limited to a particular spatial-locus, and that He is omnipresent. But it would be Islamically unacceptable if a Muslim, appealing to this verse alone, were to pray facing any direction without making proper effort to know the exact direction of the *qibla*—that is, the Ka'aba in Mecca. The background history of this verse indicates that it was revealed after a group of Muslims had told the Prophet that on their journey they had unknowingly prayed in the wrong direction, due to darkness.¹⁷

In verse 5:93 it is stated that: 'There shall be no sin [imputed] onto those who believe and do good works for what they may have eaten [in the past].' It is told that some people thought, on the basis of this verse, that it would not be sinful to drink wine (or any other forbidden things). The *shan al-nuzul* (occasion of revelation) of this verse relates to the time when God sent down the verse that clearly forbids wine-drinking, and the companions wished to know the position of deceased friends who used to drink wine. God then revealed this verse to absolve their sins.¹⁸

It seems that in injunctions of a ritual and sociological nature, the socio-historical backgrounds of the verses are of profound importance

not only in the understanding and interpretation of their meanings and wisdom but also in the application of their universal values and principles transcending space-time parameters. Professor Fazlur Rahman's double motion theory seems to be a valid adaptation of an improvement upon some of the classical ideas on *qiyas* and other principles that could fulfil the above mentioned tasks. His theory, stated in brief, is that the specific social injunctions of the Quran must be understood in the context of their socio-history and against the general Islamic *elan*.¹⁹ From these elements, general rules or injunctions are extracted which should also be in full accord with the Islamic spirit so that they can be applied in different times.

It should be remembered that since the Quran is from God, and since God's knowledge and wisdom that is imparted in the Quran is not confined to, or exhausted by, a society and its history, the intent of the sociological approach is not to relate divine wisdom and confine it to a specific socio-historical moment; its purpose is to affirm His wisdom in dealing with His creatures who exist within the space-time dimensions. Human beings cannot think and act without the instruments that are available within the perceptual and conceptual world. Hence, even the Quran's descriptions of God, Heaven and Hell, use these tools of communication that can be easily understood and grasped by man, rather than stating the true realities of these entities. However, the Quran's purpose is not only to talk to people at their level but also to raise them to a higher plane of total human development. In this way we can understand the existence of certain statements and injunctions such as those on natural science and others, whose truth and wisdom are only gradually realized by man. The description of the development of the human foetus and the reasoning behind sexual modesty and the prohibition of alcoholic beverages are only three examples among many that illustrate this point.

The prophetic *Sunna* can be interpreted, with the exception of the ritual ordinances, by applying the socio-historical contexts to the background of the Quran. Early companions such as Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE) seem to have applied this method when the socio-economic or political circumstances of their period changed dramatically from those of the Prophet's times.²⁰ To effectively deal with the various challenges of the post-industrial world and the age of information explosion, we should seriously consider the method of hermeneutics suggested in these pages.

Notes

1. 2:23; 4:82; 10:38; 11:13-14; 17:88; and 52:34.
2. Arberry, *The Holy Koran*, pp. 27-8.
3. Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, English trans. with an intro. by A. Guillaume, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 121.
4. See also 21:1-3 where the doubters, and the rejectors of the truth of Quranic messages called them 'sorcery' to camouflage what their innermost thoughts (*asarrul-najwa*) could not refute. Also Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran*, Gibraltar, Dar al-Andalus, 1980, p. 487, n. 4.
5. Arberry, *The Holy Koran*, p. 32.
6. See Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*, pp. 25-31.
7. See for example, Bucaille, *The Bible, the Quran, and Science*.
8. See chapter 3.
9. See Qadri, *Islamic Jurisprudence in the Modern World*, especially chapter 3 where he discusses the judicial methods of all Muslim schools of law in detail in the traditional Muslim manner. For a critical assessment, see Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*; Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*; Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*; and Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology and The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*.
10. For example, Prof. Rahbar, in his seminal work, *The God of Justice*, applies a systematic analysis of the Quran based on the Quranic concept of God, attributes the gross misunderstanding surrounding God's will and human freedom that has persisted for centuries to 'the lack of any systematic attempt at the exposition of Quranic doctrine among Muslims themselves' (p. 7). Prof. Rahman analyses the effects of such yawning absence in the development of law, theology and philosophy in his *Islam and Modernity*.
11. See Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, in which he carefully assesses, by taking into consideration the various socio-political developments, the development of Islamic thought from the momentous event of the murder of Uthman in 656 until 950 CE.
12. Rahbar's remarks are more critical of traditional commentaries: 'Inter-linear commentaries of the Quran have rendered immeasurable service to Quranic studies, but they do not meet the problem of exposition of a coordinated doctrine yielded by the Quran which is the object of the present work. Commentators did not coordinate. If ever they did, with their best intentions, their coordination could never be as thorough and exhaustive as we can attempt today with concordances in hand.' *God of Justice*, p. xvii.
13. For example, al-Tirmidhi, *Bayan al-Farq al-Sadr wal-Qalb wal-Fuad wal-Lubb*, and 'A Sufi Treatise'.
14. For a discussion and an application of the methodology, see chapter 3.
15. Cited by Von Denffer, *Ulam al-Quran*, p. 92; also cited in al-Salih, *Mabahith Fi Ulum al-Quran*.
16. Von Denffer, *Ulam al-Quran*, p. 92.
17. Ibid., pp. 92-3; al-Salih, *Mabahith*, p. 161.
18. Ibid., pp. 160-61.
19. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, see the Introduction especially, pp. 5-8.
20. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*.

2

The Islamic Weltanschauung

All human values and attitudes, conscious or unconscious, are a reflection of a certain set of metaphysical beliefs or weltanschauung. The domains of knowledge and education, certainly, are two realms that are organically rooted in a world-view, as has been demonstrated by studies on the philosophy and sociology of knowledge and education.

The Islamic weltanschauung can be defined at two levels. At one level it is the totality of human interpretation of the world and of our lives in the world, and this poses a problem of epistemology. At another level, it is the totality of the value by which man lives, and this constitutes a problem of ethics. Weltanschauung deals with ultimate questions, with universal and general decisions. An individual world-view includes, among other things, the educational, political, philosophical and moral attitude of a person.¹ Thus a systematic and coherent articulation of a true Islamic weltanschauung is necessary if, as Professor Fazlur Rahman insists 'various specific fields of intellectual endeavour are to cohere as informed by Islam'.² The articulation of such a weltanschauung based on the Quran and the authentic conduct and sayings of Prophet Muhammad is also a valuable criterion for evaluating the performance of historical Islam.³ A just and critical assessment of our past will surely provide a more informed Islamic direction to the present struggles for the realization of Islamic ideals and aspirations. The intricate relationship between the past,

present and future is eloquently expressed by the prominent Spanish philosopher, Julian Marias: 'The present, which is laden with the entire past, bears the future within itself; the mission of the present consists of setting the future in motion.'⁴ And since the mission of Islam, as can be easily discerned from the Quran and the *Sunna*, is to direct history according to its socio-moral world-view, a critical assessment of the past and the Islamization of the present is logically necessary.

Discussions on world-views normally centre on the idea of God or gods, the concept of man and his destiny, and the universe.⁵ The Islamic world-view naturally consists of these elements, and like Judaism and Christianity, would not be intelligible without the key concept of prophecy. In fact, the great Muslim reformer of the fourteenth century CE, Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya, suggested that incorrect understanding of the concept and mission of prophethood was the primary error of Muslim philosophers and theologians.⁶ In this chapter, the concept of prophethood in Islam will be discussed very briefly because it will be taken up again in the following chapter on the discussion of the authority of the *Sunna*.

The Concept of God

Ontologically one can say that Islam, as found in the Quran, is theocentric because the only true reality is the One God, Allah, the Necessary Being. Everything else in this creation is contingent upon His Will. In the Quran, the terms Allah and *Rabb* (the Lord, Sustainer) combined, occur more than 3,750 times. This numerical quantity does not include the other adjective-attributes of God which Muslim theologians call *al-Asma al-Husna* (the most beautiful names), and personal pronouns referring to Him. Teleologically, however, the Quran and Islam are anthropocentric as affirmed by Izutsu: 'Man, his nature, conduct, psychology, duties and destiny are, in fact, as much a central preoccupation of the Koranic thought as the problem of God Himself. . . .'⁷

The idea of Allah was not new to the pre-Islamic Arabs. This is evident from pre-Islamic poetry, compound personal names and old inscriptions.⁸ But Allah, the One God, or the idea of the divine itself, did not have the kind of urgency and centrality in their world-view as demanded by the Quran. They did believe in Allah as the 'Lord of the House' and as the creator of the heavens and the earth including *Kaba*, as the Quran itself testifies (96:123; 29:61). However, to them, Allah

was but one of the 'Gods',⁹ albeit the Highest, to whom they set up intermediaries (39:3) and to whom they assigned daughters (16:57). Their worshipping of Allah was expedient: they invoked His name in their oaths (35:40; 16:3) and even in the killing of their daughters (6:137). They cried for His help in trouble but then reverted to polytheism: 'Then, when misfortune reaches you, unto Him you cry for help. And afterwards, when He has rid you of the misfortune, behold! a set of you attribute partners to their Lord.'¹⁰ Izutsu terms this expediency 'temporary monotheism'.¹¹ This ambiguous relationship with God caused the pre-Islamic Arab to entrust his destiny to the dark 'Master' called *Dahr* until his death, and to the predetermining matters (*azdar*) that were beyond man's control, and which produced the well-known pessimistic nihilist world-view of the *jahiliyya*.¹²

After the Quran had revealed the concept of God, Allah, as the Highest and the Most Central factor in the life of man and the universe, the *jahiliyya* Arabs initiated and carried out formidable challenges to the message of Muhammad.¹³

God, according to the Quran, is Absolutely Real (*al-Haqq*), while all the rest of the deities are false (*batil*), nothing but mere names. He is not a projection of man's mind as Feuerbach tends to think, nor is He a product of resentment of those who have fallen short as Nietzsche thinks. He is neither an illusion of those who have remained infantile as Freud contends nor is He, as Marx conjectures, an opium of the masses, a consolation serving vested interests.¹⁴ He is Eternally Living (*al-Hayy al-Qayyum*), transcending the limitations of spatio-temporal order, being the First (*al-Awwal*), the Last (*al-Akhir*), the External (*al-Zahir*), and the Internal (*al-Batin*). The exact nature of God is not knowable for He is beyond comprehension.

However, in order to facilitate human understanding and thus influence their behaviour, God uses metaphors and similitudes from what is loftiest in the heavens and the earth (30:27) and from our own experiences (20:28). The description of His attributes are many, but can be summarized under a few essential heads: Life, Eternity, Unity, Power, Truth, Beauty, Justice, Love, and Goodness. These are just pointers to the Ultimate Being, serving as the ultimate human ideals that He has implanted in our natures.

The most important aspect of God in the Quran is His Oneness, the affirmation, of which became the most fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings, that is, *tawhid*. The spiritual, intellectual, and socio-moral implications of this concept can be obtained both from the Quran itself as well as through logical deduction.¹⁵ Briefly then, God is one,¹⁶ not

having been born, neither having any offspring,¹⁷ nor having any partners;¹⁸ for if there were to be more than one God, there would definitely be disorder and chaos in the universe.¹⁹ He is *al-Samad*, the Eternal, Self-Subsisting Being, who is, metaphorically, likened to a hard, solid rock which provides anchor to everything.²⁰ No wonder then that the short, early Meccan *sura* (112:1-4) which contains this description of God's unity has been traditionally considered as equivalent to one-third of the entire Quran.²¹

From this One God, then, emerged one humanity which, though divided into races and tribes, male and female, is essentially one in its purpose on earth,²² and in its ultimate destination. The unity of God who is Truth, the Light, logically implies the unity of knowledge, that is, the unity of prophethood (*nubuwwa*). The unity of knowledge, as will be elaborated on later in this work, means, for example, that there is no bifurcation between what is called secular and religious sciences, neither in their teleology nor in utility. God is the originator of the heavens and the earth and everything therein and in between. He is the *Rabb*, which means the Lord, the Owner and Nourisher, also the Bringer-up by degrees to full conclusion, or the Educator, the Guardian,²³ as God, via *Jibrail*, revealed to Muhammad for the first time at the cave of Hira. During that historic moment, He made known to him that God is the *Rabb*, who is the Creator and Teacher: 'Read! Read in name of your *Rabb* who created. Created Man from a clot. Read: And thy *Rabb* is the most Bounteous, who taught man by the Pen, taught man which he knew not' (96:1-5). The idea of *Rabb* is further explained in other verses dealing with His relationship with His creation: 'Praise the name of thy *Rabb*, The Most High, who has created and then gave order and proportion, who has fixed a measure [for every being] and then granted it its guidance' (87:3; 20:50). Without God, there would be nothing; and if there were to be more than one God, certainly there would be disorder in the universe.

The Lordship (*Rububiyya*) of God is characterized by mercy and justice. In fact, the most frequent epithets used in the Quran which refer to God are *al-Rahman al-Rahim* which stand at the head of all *suras* but one.²⁴ He is also the Pardoner (*al-Afuww*) (4:43), and the Forgiver (*al-Ghafir*) (7:155; 40:3), but He is also to be Reckoner (*al-Hasib*) (4:86; 33:39) and Lord of Retribution (7:95). All these aspects of God only confirm our thesis that they are primarily concerned with stimulating and enlivening man's moral potentialities. A God who is forgiving, patient, and yet is swift in punishment will strengthen the moral fibre in those who do not take Him for granted! A man who is

truly convinced of the reality of this God will strive hard in all circumstances to do good according to the values revealed by God, and if he falters or falls short, he knows God will forgive.

As mentioned above, the Quran is basically concerned about man. In its statements about the Divine, the primary intent could be interpreted as functional to man's positive cognitive-moral growth as well as to vindicate the orderliness of this universe.²⁵

For example, the emphasis on the non-compromising position of *tawhid*, and the assertion of the Oneness of God is intended to develop and to free man's intellect to discover the truth by dissociating from the shackles of intermediaries who may obstruct this process. Thus, the Quran condemns those who follow their subjective notions (*hawa*), making them as gods (*arbab*) which obstruct their sense of hearing and thinking about objective truths. These people, ontologically, the Quran places lower than cattle! (25:43-4). In a similar vein, the Quran condemns those who follow their forefathers blindly in spite of the truth from God (revealed through the truthful Prophet) as 'deaf, dumb, and senseless' (2:170-1). The importance of freeing man's intellect especially in religio-spiritual matters is explicitly evident in the Quranic criticism of the Jews and Christians which equates them with the *kafirun* and *mushrikun*, (those who associate others with God) who turn the rabbis and monks and Isa, son of Maryam, into gods (9:31-3). The idea here is not the rejection of a learned group per se but the rejection of the surrender of personal duty of each individual to seek out the truth, to convince himself and act accordingly. It is an emphasis upon the direct link with God Himself, without any intermediaries. This personal relationship with God and the emphasis on the individual efforts and struggles to seek and act according to objective truths whether revelational, historical, natural, or logical, is very evident in the Quranic world-view.

Related to this ideal purpose is Islam's prohibition of all forms of superstitious beliefs and practices like magic, sorcery, astrology, and all varieties of predicting the future. The Quran condemns, for example, the customary Quraish practice of divining arrows as impiety (*fisq*).²⁶ These beliefs and practices necessarily force man to be dependent upon them while they should be dependent on God. The Quranic denunciation of addiction-forming substances and activities such as intoxicants and gambling, besides warning of their grave socio-economic consequences, also aims at freeing man's mental faculties and physical capacities for their intended purposes.

Another example of the functional motive behind the Quranic description of God's attributes is provided by the idea of His Immanence. Several times the Quran mentions that God is present everywhere and that He is ever near; in fact closer than man's own neck vein! What does this mean? Certainly it does not mean the physical locus of God residing in or near man! It does imply, as the context indicates, that God is ever aware and watching man's internal impulses and covert acts, hoping that man will refrain from being stubbornly unmindful of the ultimate ends of his acts. In Sura *al Hashr* aya 19, the Quran reminds Muslims not to be like those whom God has caused to forget themselves as a consequence of their forgetting God. Consequently, they became transgressors. On the other hand, the nearness of God is also intended to provide relief and spiritual upliftment to those who are struggling 'on the right way' (as in 2:186). This concept thus has a double-edged significance to man's moral development. Since God is so necessary for man, the level of consciousness of God (*taqwa*) necessarily becomes one of the most important instruments in the Quranic process of personality development. *Taqwa* becomes the only criterion of honour among mankind that the Quran recognizes (49:13). It is an all-comprehensive concept that integrates belief, knowledge, and action.²⁷

From this perspective (the anthropocentric teleology of the Quranic description of God), it can be said that many classical Muslim thinkers such as those of the Mutazilites, the Mutakallimun (theologians), the philosophers and the traditionalists have missed the purpose of the Quran and the general Quranic *elan* in varying degrees on this issue.²⁸ Every sect apparently seeks to defend or explain God on the basis of a certain prized principle because of the lack of an integrated and coherent articulation of a Quranic world-view. Thus we see the Mutazilites defending God's Unity and Justice at the cost of His Mercy and Forgiveness; while the philosophers reduce Him to a contentless Principle detached from His creatures and history. The theologians who generally uphold the aspect of His Omnipotence and arbitrary Will have had great difficulties reconciling this with the Quranic notion of human freedom and responsibility. The sufis, who seek the Quranic ideal of personal contact with God, nevertheless became drowned in the 'selfish' struggle which neglects all socio-political concerns, the proper realization of which are important ingredients of Islamic piety and success. The traditionalists, guarding jealously the literal descriptions of the Quran, fall into the quagmire of dangerous anthropomorphism which negates the single-most

important Quranic statement on God: 'There is nothing similar to Him' (42:11), or 'There is none comparable to Him' (112:4).

The Concept of Man

The Quran, being a guidance for mankind, is logically aimed directly at man.²⁹ Marshall Hodgson, while discussing the Quranic recounts of earlier prophets, correctly says that the cosmos of the Quran is 'intensely human and even social' with a strong sense of common human destiny.³⁰ Khadduri, in his latest work, notes this human concern within the context of justice:

Second only to the existence of One God, no other religious principles are more emphasised in the Quran and Traditions than the principles of uprightness, equity, and temperance, partly because of their intrinsic value but mainly because of the reaction against the pre-Islamic social order which paid little or no attention to justice.³¹

In the Quran references to man as a species are conveyed by the term *al-insan* which occurs sixty-five times and its plural form of *al-nas* and *al-ins* which occur, respectively two hundred and forty and eighteen times.³² In all except one (17:4), the appearance of the definite article '*al*' joined to *Insan* seems to have some significance. S. H. Shamma proposes that this article has a function similar to that in *al-Allah* (Allah) which seems to have raised the original meaning of God to that of a universal and unique God.³³ In the case of *Insan*, it seems to have given extra importance to mankind with its universal import and uniqueness. This thesis is plausible as the following discussion about man's nature, his purpose and the relationship of the universe to him will hopefully indicate.

The Quran talks about two levels of the creation of man. The first level is that of *ghayb*, the unseen which occurred in primordial time, which is known only through revealed knowledge. The second level is the so-called natural biological process that man knows through experience as well as science.

At the primordial stage, it is mentioned repeatedly that man is created *ex nihilo* from lower organic substances referred to as *tin*, (clay), *turab* (dust and mud), *min salsal min hamai masnun* (and from dark altered clay) which God moulded with His own Hand and when it was fully formed, breathed His Spirit into it. This divine spirit, moulded

in the 'best possible form' (94:4) into the human organism has neutralized, and in fact, superseded the humbler materialistic composition of the human constitution and made man the most honoured of God's creatures. This is perhaps one of the reasons why God ordered the angels to prostrate to Adam, the First Man.

Another reason for man's unique position is his capacity for creative knowledge and his acceptance of the *amana*, the trust which no other creation was able to accept for fear of not being able to discharge it properly. Man accepted it with all the consequences that entail from success as well as failure to uphold the trust. At this level also, man made a covenant with God confirming his Lordship.

The second level of the creation of man is the scientifically known biological process: a sperm which lodged in a firm place and was turned into a lump which was later equipped with bones and flesh.

A closer study of the verses dealing with the creation of man indicates that the primary intention of the Quran is not scientific, though some of its biological descriptions have been in accord with the established scientific facts. The Quranic propositions regarding the primordial stage are beyond the investigative range and scope of scientific methods and instruments and as such should be accepted as they are. The primary motives of the Quran *vis-à-vis* man's creation can be generally stated as follows:

1. to refute the Christians' attribution of divinity to Jesus, son of Mary, through his unique birth, because Adam was also created from dust as stated in 3:59-60;
2. to inform man of his uniqueness and purpose of creation and duties as in 2:30-33 and 33-72, etc.;
3. to affirm the fact that God, who first created man *ex nihilo* certainly can, and shall, raise him again for accountability as in 22:5. 'O mankind! If ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust . . .';
4. to develop a higher sense of God-consciousness, *taqwa*, as in 6:2; and related to it, humility, for example in 18:32-44: 'O mankind! Be ever conscious of your Lord [ittaqi rabbakum] who created you from a single person and from each it created its mate and from them together had spread a broad multitude of men and women. Be ever conscious of God [uwa i-taqui l-Lah] in whom ye claim [your rights] of one another, and toward the wombs [that bore you]. Lo! God has been a watcher over you (4:1).'

It is important to note that mankind in the Quran comes from a single person, *nafs wahida*.³⁴ The division of humanity into male and female, into groups and tribes, cannot be construed as there being one sex or group superior to another except in the degree of *taqwa* which consists of good, comprehensive belief and useful work. The Quran recognizes palpable differences among human individuals in terms of moral, intellectual and physical capacities, but the essential equality, and mutual responsibility of the human race is categorically affirmed. In 6:165, the fact that God 'raises some above others' is a bounty that entails accountability: 'Allah has made you vice-regents on earth, and He has raised some of you above the others so that He might test you in what He has given you.'

Even though man is of divine origin with a superior status to other living things the Quran is replete with descriptions and declarations of man's not having lived up to his highest potentiality and noble purpose: 'Nay, but [man] has never yet fulfilled what He has enjoined upon him' (80:23). Man is mentioned as ever grudging, and niggardly (17:100), stubbornly contentious (18:54), ungrateful (7:10; 36:45-7), impatient (70:19-21), hasty in action (96:6-14), as loving the fleeting life, pushing back in his consciousness the remembrance of the grievous day (76:27), transgressing all bounds (96:6-14), and as having numerous other faults.

These two opposing tendencies form the tension which seems to demonstrate the unique Quranic wisdom in extracting the highest moral performance from man: 'Verily we created Man in the best mould and thereafter we reduced him to the lowest of the low excepting only those who attain to faith and do good works . . .' (95:4-6). And in 103:2-3 this characteristic tension is expressed in another way: 'Indeed, man is in a state of loss, except those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.'

The discussion concerning man's nature from the perspective of the Quran is necessarily linked to the idea of the trust which man (or the Quran sometimes uses Adam, as the archetype of man) accepted in primordial time, and the idea of his freedom which is fundamental to his nature and destiny. Both of these ideas or concepts have been differently interpreted by Muslims.

Early interpreters of the Quran like Ibn Abbas (d. 688 CE) thought that the trust in 33:72 which the heaven, the earth, and the mountains refused but man accepted, refers to obedience (*al-Ta'a*). al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE) considered it as the obligatory duties (*al-faraid*) while

Qatada added *Sharia* punishments (*hudud*) to al-Hasan's definition.³⁵ Ibn Abbas is clearly wrong because it is mentioned in many places in the Quran that everything in the heavens and the earth gives obedience to God.³⁶ The other two interpretations are only partly plausible because the obligations and penal law are only consequences or implications of the trust. The fundamental difference between man and all other creations is that he will be judged both historically and in post-history while the others are not. Judgment in history concerns the total performance of a people while the post-historical one deals with individuals.³⁷ This necessarily implies that the object to be judged must be empowered with volition and intellect, which constitute the *amana*.³⁸ The consequences of these two 'powers' with their limitless possibilities for good and evil are the reasons why neither the earth nor the heavens nor the mountains were willing, or capable of accepting it. In other words, volitional and intellectual faculties are part of the essential definition of man. All other creations of God have their own unique characteristics and predispositions whereby they fit properly into the universe. This is what the Quran calls God's 'guidance', 'command', and 'measure' of everything.³⁹

The question of human volition and freedom, unfortunately, has been much debated outside the Quranic imperative. The origin of the controversy lies in verses of the Quran such as the following:

1. 'This message is no less than a reminder to all mankind, to everyone of you who wills to walk a straight way. But you cannot will it unless God . . . wills';⁴⁰
2. 'If God so willed, they would not have ascribed divinity to other than God. Hence, we have not made thee [Muhammad] their keeper, and neither are thou responsible for their conduct.'⁴¹ 'He will guide whomever He pleases'⁴² and 'He leaves astray whomever He wills';⁴³
3. 'God has power over all things.'⁴⁴ 'Regulation and command of everything is in the hand of Allah.'⁴⁵

The above verses led to the idea that, since God is Super Omnipotent, man does not have any independent will or action, but somehow appropriates the actions created by God. However, if these verses are analysed within their proper context the intention behind them can be correctly comprehended and the Quranic emphasis on man's actions and his ultimate judgment, God's mercy, justice, and His 'habits' can be fully and systematically understood.

The first group of verses that apparently imply that 'man cannot

will unless God wills', do not actually mean that man cannot will but that man's ability to will or not is part of God's will, expressed in the nature of man himself. The occasion for the revelation of this *aya* (81:28-9) according to Sufyan al-Thauri was the arrogance of Abu Jahl when he said: 'It's up to us, if we wish, we will follow the straight path, and if we [also] wish we would not follow it.'⁴⁶ Abu Jahl is an example par excellence of those individuals who ignore their origins and their relationship with God out of mere arrogance, denying any ties with Him. The intent of this verse is not to refute Abu Jahl's statement, for he certainly chose not to believe, but to affirm the higher relationship of human nature to God's will, as manifested in the terms *qadr*, *taqdir*, *huda*, *amr*.

God in the Quran is just and merciful. He does not arbitrarily punish any nation which has fallen into wrong doing until a messenger is sent to guide them, and they have been given the chance to repent.⁴⁷ Similarly with individuals, the verses that imply God's misguiding people, if closely observed, do not form the first premise of the Quranic argument upon man's actions, but almost always form the logical conclusion about those individuals who have persistently rejected the truth and stubbornly adhered to immorality. In such cases, God's will, the 'natural law' or 'psychological rule' becomes operative in such a way that those negative, destructive attitudes and behaviours become reinforced and deeply embedded into the personality in a dangerously permanent state. Still, the Quran does not admit of a point of no return for those who sincerely repent and change their ways. Man is given freedom to choose and act and he will be held accountable to the smallest element: 'And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it.'⁴⁸ W. Montgomery Watt in his seminal work, *Free-will and Predestination in Early Islam*, is correct when he points out that the 'predestinarian view' of the Quran centres on the majesty and omnipotence of God, and to a lesser extent on man's subordination to this majestic Being; whereas the predetermined character of man's life occupies the forefront of Muslim tradition, a remnant of pre-Islamic world-view despite the Quranic denunciation of it.⁴⁹

In summary, the motive of the Quran in these verses is to enhance the human relationship with, and the consciousness of, his Lord, the Creator, the Generous, and to encourage the believers not to be overly anxious of the opposition and rebellions of certain people because these are part of the 'will of God'. The attitude of reliance on God will

produce personalities that are ever-optimistic and courageous once they know the true worth of their actions. Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), in addressing the younger generation of Muslims in *Asrar-i-Khudi* epitomises the dynamism of reliance on the one God

When they moulded thee of clay,
Love and fear will mingle in thy making;
Fear of this world and of the world to come,
fear of death,
Fear of all the pains of earth and heaven,
Love of riches and power, love of country,
Love of self, of kindred and wife,
so long as thou hold'st the staff of *La ilah*.⁵⁰
Thou wilt break every spell of fear!
One to whom God is as the soul in his body,
Does not bow his head before untruth.⁵¹

The Concept of the Universe

The concept of the universe in the Quran is conveyed by the phrase 'the Heavens and the Earth and whatever lies between them' as in 39:5;

Have they not pondered upon themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth and what is between them, save with truth and for a destined end. But truly, many of mankind are disbelievers in the meeting with their Lord.

The term *sama* ('heaven' or 'sky') is applied to anything that is spread like a canopy above any other thing as in the case of our visible skies which is the primary meaning of this term in the Quran. It also connotes 'the cosmic system',⁵² the universe. The term *al-ard* in relation to the process of creation is not only the planet Earth, but the entire inorganic universe including the planet Earth.⁵³ Of course, references to specific creations of God either of the Seen (*al-shahada*) or the Unseen (*al-ghayb*), like the *jinn* and angels, also denote parts of the Quranic universe.⁵⁴

The *shahada*, the visible phenomena, are of course all that is visible that exist in the entire cosmos; the *ghayb*, on the other hand, represent all that is beyond human perception including not only the *jinn* and angels but also past historical events which have been forgotten or are

vaguely remembered by man, such as man's inner whisperings (5:119), the eschatological realities such as the coming of the Day of Judgment (34:3), or Heaven and Hell (19:61). God created this entire creation, a *creatio ex nihilo* by a mere command, 'He is who created the heavens and the earth in truth. In that day when He said "Be!" Then it was'.⁵⁵ From this watershed of creative command, He allowed the universe to evolve in a periodic time, called *ayyam*,⁵⁶ plural for *yaum*, which is commonly translated as 'day' or 'eon'. This term is used in Arabic to denote any period whether extremely long or extremely short.⁵⁷ The process of creation by God continues indefinitely (35:1). This universe has no gaps or dislocation, a testimony to the unity and majesty of God (67:3-4). The sun and the moon run their courses for a determined period (36:38-9). All natural phenomena are given their respective proportions, measures, orders and laws: from the growth of a seed into a plant bearing flowers and fruit to the constellations in the sky and the succession of the day to night all reflect this orderliness.⁵⁸

This universe does not exist to provide sport but for definite ends.⁵⁹ Neither are these creations ends in themselves, opaque and spiritually meaningless;⁶⁰ rather, they are signs (*aya*) pointing beyond their own forms to a higher Reality.⁶¹ The fact that natural phenomena are referred to in the same way as revelational knowledge means that they both demand the same consideration—that is, to be contemplated and thought about. Also, the Quran twice uses the term *kalimatul-lah* ('the words of Allah', in 18:109 and 31:27) referring to the extra-scriptural, that is, the natural wonders of God. The same term is used to convey revelational knowledge of the Prophets and chosen individuals.⁶² The *aya* (signs) of God are also used for psychological phenomena (41:53). Thus, it can be maintained that the Quran considers several avenues to guidance, to an understanding of the higher purpose and laws of life and existence. On the one hand, there is the verbal-scriptural guidance revealed in a specific language addressed to the immediate situation of a people, and through them to the whole of mankind. On the other hand, there is the universal guidance in natural phenomena, history and human psychology from which mankind should be able to derive benefits. Both complement each other, and one cannot be dispensed with in the attainment of the highest level of Quranic individual and collective development.

History has seen that Muslims became 'backward' when they held steadfastly *only* to the first guidance, while modern man became 'unhappy' and 'lost' using only the second type of guidance. The knowledge of, and the power over, the universe, is to be more

conscious of God's favours, wisdom, and majesty, and then, to improve human welfare. The controversial German theologian Hans Kung narrated a story that is indicative of the arrogant mood of many modern secular scientists: when questioned about whether he believes in the existence of God a Nobel Laureate declared: 'Of course not, I am a scientist.'⁶³ The Quranic philosophy of the universe would prompt the scientist to answer: 'Yes, of course! I am a scientist!' Muhammad Iqbal correctly warns that scientific knowledge that does not enhance, and is not subordinated to religion is satanic. He wrote, 'Intellect, divorced from Love (*Ishq*), is a rebel (like Satan) while intellect, wedded to Love, has divine attributes.'⁶⁴ The tragic and morally paralysing effects of the secular humanist philosophy and world-view have pervaded every level of the modern West. Even Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his commencement address at Harvard University in 1978, categorically warned that the most impressive scientific and technological achievements could not redeem the moral poverty so prevalent in the Western world.⁶⁵

It is indeed very humbling to know that the entire universe and its contents are made for the use of man.⁶⁶ However, all creation in itself such as the angels, birds and even the thunder is spiritually significant in the sense that it hymns the praise of God in the manner that surpasses human understanding.⁶⁷ Even though the entire universe is made to be utilized by man, this utilization is for the enhancement of man's true purpose in creation: to perform service (*ibada*) to God: 'I did not create *jinn* and Man except to worship me' (51:56-8). Hence, man should use the entire cosmos not merely for his physical and intellectual needs but more importantly, for his moral-spiritual advancement. His power over the cosmos is for good in the widest possible sense; and not to sow corruption which the Quran repeatedly condemns.⁶⁸ The 'corruption on earth, on the land and in the sea' is due to men's actions (30:41), as a manifestation of their extravagance (27:34) which stems from greed.

The current sentimentalism regarding the natural environment which is sweeping the industrialized nations is an overdue reaction to, and realization of, the hazards of irresponsible exploitation of nature that was motivated by greed and inspired and justified by a disjointed theology that exaggerated man's supremacy in the universe. The extreme anthropocentric bias in Tudor and Stuart England, for example, enabled theologians to represent the world's physical attributes as a direct response to Adam's sin: 'It was only because of the Fall that wild animals were fierce, that obnoxious

reptiles existed, and that domestic animals had to go blows in misery.'⁶⁹ The disjointed theology is clear in a statement from Jeremiah Burroughes writing in his *Gospel Reconciliation* (1657) that God 'made others for man, and man for himself'.⁷⁰ The attitude that nature is something to be enjoyed and used to the fullest extent possible in the pursuit of the dreams of material progress alone, without any responsibility and accountability, has produced various kinds of ecological crises that have plagued modern man, and can be attributed to 'the destruction of harmony between man and God', a relationship that concerns all knowledge.⁷¹ According to Professor Keith Thomas the current preservationist attitudes toward animals and nature as a whole are emotional and conflict with the materialistic and hedonistic direction of the industrialized world.⁷² But, more importantly, this sentimentalism threatens the basic economic resources of poor people; developing nations regard these new sensibilities ironically:

During colonial times, much of our forests was claimed for timber and for planting rubber, palm-oil, tea, sugar. . . . Little concern was then expressed about the environment. Now as we seek to open up our lands for modern farming, for generation of power and for industrialisation, a whole host of environmentalists from industrialised countries have descended upon us to agitate our people about preserving the natural beauty of our tropical forest. . . . We will not accept a situation where our rural people live in poverty and misery so that the rich, when they come by can say 'what unspoiled beauty' . . . then tip the 'happy' native children ten cents. . . .⁷³

The Quranic notion regarding the subjugation of the entire universe for man is not unqualified and unpurposeful: man's freedom, his intellect and other faculties, as well as this vast cosmos should, and must be used, not for mere pleasure but as a form of worship. In this way, the intrinsic spiritual dimension of all created things, used by man to worship God, will incur no disjunction but harmony in the purpose and order of creation. *ibada* or worship in the Quran is a very general and comprehensive concept which is frequently joined to other key ethical terms like *shukr* (thankfulness) as in 29:66 and 17:3, and to *taqwa* (God-consciousness) as in 29:16, 71:3 and numerous other places.

Man has been reminded often in the Quran to be thankful for all the favours that he receives from his Lord, whether they be material or spiritual: 'Eat of the good things that we have provided for you and

give thanks to God' (16:114; 34:15). 'Exalt the greatness of God that He has guided you and you may give thanks' (2:185). *Shukr* should be manifested in several interrelated ways: by recognizing in the heart and the mind the favours received from God; by praising, eulogizing or commanding verbally; and by using the favours according to their intended purposes.⁷³ The opposite of *shukr* is *israf* which means wastefulness or putting a thing in a wrong place.⁷⁴ The Quran urges moderation in consumption as well as spending and warns against *israf*: 'O children of Adam! Attend to your adornment when you go to the mosques, and eat and drink and be not wasteful; surely He loves not the prodigals (7:31).⁷⁵ In 25:67, while mentioning the qualities of His good servants the Quran says: 'And they who, when they spend are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just mean is ever between them.' Indeed *shukr* occupies a remarkable position in the whole system of Islamic ethics to the extent that the lack of it is condemned as *kufur*, one of the most ethico-spiritual negatives of the Quran.⁷⁶ Thus, *shukr* has a key relationship to *ibada*, and provides the qualitative and quantitative criteria for the use of human faculties and bounties in the universe. This is another example of the creative and positive tension that the Quran uses to enhance man's spiritual moral development. *Taqwa* is only the other side of the coin of *ibada*. It is fitting that since man's purpose is *ibada* to God, that should therefore be the only criterion for status differentiation among men. The Quran puts it very succinctly:

O Mankind! Surely we have created you from male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the one with the most *taqwa*. Surely Allah is knowing, Aware. (49:13)

Taqwa is perhaps the most comprehensive and representative of an ideal human characteristic among the Quranic ethical terms.⁷⁷ In its various forms (including the active participle *muttaqun* and the abstract noun *taqwa*) the word occurs 242 times, almost as often in the Meccan as in the Medinan period—102 times and 140 respectively.⁷⁸ It appears more often in Medinan; the reason seems to be that in Medina interhuman relationships are the main subject of Islamic concerns. *Taqwa* can only be exercised in a social context. An isolated individual can hardly be a *muttaqi*. Its comprehensiveness is clearer because the root meaning of *w-q-y*, root letters of *taqwa*, means to protect, to save from destruction, and to preserve.⁷⁹ These are the basic constituents of

iman and Islam which give the meaning safety, peace, and integrity as opposed to danger, fragmentation and disintegration.

... while *iman* [faith] is primarily concerned with the inner life (although it is supposed to end in overt action), and while Islam (Surrender to God's law) belongs primarily to outward action (though its inner dimension is equivalent to faith), *taqwa* equally comprises both faith and surrender. . . .⁸⁰

The passage 2:177 defines 'those who attain *taqwa*' in a comprehensive manner and emphasizes that overt acts that are not rooted in inner faith are not righteous. Thus, after mentioning the change of *qiblah* (direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca it says:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces eastward or westward [in prayer]; the righteous rather, is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book [i.e., all revealed Books] and [all] the Prophets [and] who gives of his wealth despite his love for it, to his [poor] kinsmen, to orphans, to the indigents, to the way-farer, to those who ask for financial help, and for the freeing of captives and slaves; he who establishes prayers and pays *zakat*-tax, those who keep their pacts when they make them and are steadfast in adversity, tribulation and in war—these are the ones who are truly righteous and these are the ones who have *taqwa* (*muttaqun*).

The 'security' or 'safety' dimension of *taqwa* becomes clearer when it mentions that *taqwa* is the best garment (*libas*) (7:26), and in 2:197 that *taqwa* is the best provision for future life. *Taqwa* then is the moral torch that man needs to make objective evaluation of his thoughts and actions as well as his environment.⁸¹ Since there are men who are self deluding, thinking that they are 'reforming the earth' while they are in fact corrupting it (2:11) and thinking that their deeds are 'weighty' while in actuality they are 'like ashes' (14:18), there is a need for the Final Judgment. The fact that man shall die and will be raised again to give a full account of the omission or commission of his *amara* is central to Quranic weltanschauung.⁸² In fact, in many places the expression 'belief in God' is coupled with 'belief in the Day of Judgment' which indicates the intrinsic inseparability of the two fundamental anchors in the Quranic view in the enrichment of human moral conduct.⁸³ Positive consciousness of the Judgment Day would

put into perspective man's entire life: its ephemerality, and the inevitability of imminent accountability that should restrain him from the seductions of 'momentary life' and lead him to one that is founded on a solid basis.⁸⁴

Thus, the ideal human character of the Quran is the *muttaqi*, the one who has attained *taqwa* (God-consciousness). This implies directly that he should be *Muslim*, submitting to the laws of God, after discovering them in the Book of Revelation and Creation (nature and human psychology and history). Spiritually, a *muttaqi* is a *mumin* whose faith is grounded in *tawhid* (affirming the oneness of God), *shukr* (thankfulness) and the Ultimate End. His *iman* (faith) is grounded firmly in knowledge of the word of God in Revelation and the work of God in creation. He, then, shall join the community of Muslims to 'enjoin good, forbid evil', 'co-operating in righteousness and *taqwa*', to use all the resources in nature and wisdom from historical experiences and psychic phenomena to establish and maintain a socio-moral order on earth—an order that reflects the harmonious relationship between God, man and the universe, according to the precepts enjoined by God. The Quranic man is an integrated man,⁸⁵ who is first of all cured of all the maladies of the soul, not by having all tensions and complexes removed in the manner of modern psychoanalysis so that he becomes like a plant quiescent but without an inner drive, but by having all those tensions that arise from his natural constituencies and from his profound urge and need for the transcendent in him realized and fulfilled.⁸⁶

The Concept of Prophethood

In an Islamic world-view the knowledge about God, the *ghayb*, the purpose of human existence, man's destiny and that of the universe is conveyed throughout history by a special group of human beings known as messengers (*rusul*) or prophets (*anbiya*). The Quran seems not to make any distinction between these two functions as do the Mutazilites; but orthodox theologians consider that 'a Messenger is a man sent by Allah to creatures in order to convey His judgments; and the bringing of a book may be stipulated of him, in contrast to a prophet (*al-nabi*), for "prophet" is a more general term.'⁸⁷

Be that as it may, the messengers of God have been sent to all peoples (10:47; 13:7). Some of their names are given in the Quran while others are not (4:164; 40:78), and all of them conveyed the same basic message: to invite their people, and through them all mankind,

to the true worship of the One God, and to shun powers of evil. They were vouchsafed clear signs in the form of revelation, and some were given scriptures. They purified their people and taught them wisdom through a language understood by their respective audiences and said that they would stand for justice. The Prophets were the bringers of the good news of the eternal rewards from God for correct belief and good deeds, and warners of painful punishment for rejection of faith and transgression. The knowledge pertaining directly to their duties was revealed to them without any conscious preparation or effort on their part in three different ways: revelation, from behind a veil (that is, by a voice whose source was invisible), or through a messenger (*Jibrail*). The contents of these revelations are variously described as guidance (*huda*), truth (*haqq*), light (*nur*) and the criterion for judging between righteousness and falsehood (*furqan*).

Muhammad is the seal of the prophets but Muslims believe in all the previous prophets without any distinction between any of them. H. A. R. Gibb, contrary to many of his contemporary western scholars, perceives the unity of prophethood that Islam portrays when he writes:

Thus Islam, although a religion physically centered on Mecca, is not an Arabian religion, nor even an Arabian adaptation of Judaic or Christian monotheism, if by that is implied a lowering of existing standards of Judaism and Syriac Christianity to a supposedly lower Arabian mentality. On the contrary, the whole function of Islam was to raise both Arabian and non-Arabian religious conceptions and ethical standards to levels set by the preaching of earlier prophets.⁸⁸

Prophets are exemplary human beings whose conduct, sayings and virtues are enjoined to be obeyed upon their followers. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, their *Sunna* especially that of Muhammad, manifests categories of permanence and socio-historical relativity.

Notes

1. Horowitz, *Philosophy, Science and the Sociology of Knowledge*, p. 140. The foundational works on the sociology of knowledge with epistemological significance are those of Karl Mannheim: see *Ideology and Utopia* and *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. A scholar with a deep metaphysical emphasis regarding this subject is Max Scheler, whose main works are *Problem of a Sociology of*

Knowledge and Man's Place in Nature. An example of how philosophical and metaphysical propositions are related to education can be seen in Butler, *Four Philosophies and the Practice in Education and Religion*.

2. See Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 133, and also his *Islam*, p. 256.
3. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, pp. 147-9. The critical evaluation of historical Islam, in various degrees of profundity, has been consistently applied by many Muslim reformers whether fundamentalists such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792 CE), the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan or the Modernists like Muhammad Abdo (d. 1905 CE), Muhammadiyah of Indonesia, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1937), Malik Bennabi (d. 1974), or Fazlur Rahman, in their attempts to purify the Quran and the authentic *Sunna* of the Prophet from various unIslamic accretions that have shielded the true understanding of these sources from the Muslims. However, traditionalists, whether western-educated like Frithof Schuon, Martin Lings and S. H. Nasr or eastern-educated such as Abul Ali Hasan al-Nadwi, seem to reject this concept. Thus, al-Nadwi for example, criticizes al-Maududi of Jamaat-i-Islami who contends the loss of a true understanding of the basic Quranic concepts of *Ilah*, *Din*, *Rabb*, and *ibada*, making Muslims unable to understand three-quarters of the Quran. See Abul Ala Maududi, *Fundamentals of Basic Quranic Terms*. Al-Nadwi's argument based on the Quran (15:9 and 75:17-19) concerning God's promise to safeguard the Quran and its explanations, and the *hadith* on the Muslim non-agreement on error, are not appropriate and historically untrue. See S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood*.
4. Marias, *Historia de la Filosofia*, p. 468.
5. Brandon, *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions*, has made an extensive survey of archaeological discoveries, grave and tomb remains and literature of Paleolithic man, the Egyptians and of all the great religions, and reaches the conclusion that man has always been concerned about the mysterious forces that shape and influence him and has always pondered and 'prepared' for the journey after this life.
6. See Madjid, 'Ibn Taimiyya on *Kalam* and *Falsafah*'.
7. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Quran*, p. 75. Also Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*.
8. Izutsu, *God and Man*, p. 130.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
10. 16:53-4. See also 31:32 and 29:65.
11. Izutsu, *God and Man*, p. 102.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-8. Also Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 14, and W. Montgomery Watt, *Free-will and Predestination in Early Islam*, p. 19-20.
13. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
14. See Kung, *Does God Exist?* and Abul Kalam Azad, 'The Quranic Conception of God,' 7 pts., *Majallat al-Azhar*, 1 (December 1964), 1-3.
15. Hodgson, *The Venture Of Islam*, writes that *tawhid* is the single and total challenge of the Quran forms, a singularly moral world-view which rejects any activities in religion, sciences, and the arts that do not conform to the moral purpose of the Quran. For a detailed exposition of the various implications of *tawhid*, see al-Faruqi, *Tawhid*.
16. 5:73; 16:51; etc.

17. 2:116; 6:110; 10:68; etc.

18. 6:22-24, 136-37, etc.

19. 21:22.

20. Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon*, s.v. 'Samad'. See also Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 11.

21. Asad, *Message*, p. 985, mentions a *hadith* which is found in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Hanbal, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, al-Nasai, and Abu Dawud.

22. 'I [God] created *jinn* and humankind only that they might worship me' (51:56). See also 21:92.

23. Lane, *Lexicon* s.v. 'Rabb'. See also Azad, 'The Quranic Conception of God'.

24. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Allah'.

25. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 1. Also 'The Quranic concept of God, Universe and Man'.

26. The work of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792 CE), the founder of the Wahhabi movement which inspired many pre-modern reformists and fundamentalist movements, indicates the seriousness with which Islam preserves *tawhid* against all forms of superstitions and *shirk*. See his *Kitab al-Tauhid*, trans. by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Beirut, Holy Koran Publishing House-International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1979. See also al-Qardawi, *al-Halal wal Haram fil-Islam*, pp. 326-40.

27. 2:177; 35:28. See also Rahman, 'Some Key Ethical Terms of the Quran,' 165-85; Jafri, 'Particularity and Universality of the Quran with Special Reference to the Term *Taqwa*', and Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Quran*, pp. 177-83, 211-13.

28. For their view on God and other theological issues see Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*; Tritton, *Muslim Theology*; Hodgson, *Venture* 1, 386-403, 424-43; Rahman, *Islam*, ch. 5, 7 and 8; and Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*.

29. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 1.

30. Hodgson, *Venture* 1, 170.

31. Khadduri, *Islamic Conception of Justice*, p. 10.

32. Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahris li-Alfaz al-Quran al-Karim*, s.v. 'ins'.

33. al-Shamma, *The Ethical System Underlying the Quran*, p. 111.

34. The term *nafs wahida* is not translated as a single soul or spirit on purpose because the Quran does not envisage the human personality as consisting of two disparate entities: the body and the soul. In fact, after God breathed His Spirit into the moulded form, the human person took shape which organically combined in such a way that both were interdependent; i.e., one cannot conceive of the body without the soul and vice versa. Only in this context can we understand the profound wisdom of Islamic rituals whether daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimage or poor-tax, in that their physical forms are intrinsic to the spiritual purposes. The emphasis on poor tax and rejection of usury indicates beyond doubt that the so-called bodily welfare of man does not stand second to the so-called spiritual welfare. The Quranic use of *Tahara* and *Shifa* refers both to physical and spiritual cleanliness and care respectively. See Rahman, *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition*, pp. 21-2; Asad, in *Message*, p. 100, translates *nafs* as 'a living entity'.

35. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:117.

36. For example, in 3:83; 57:1; 59:1.

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6. See Madjid, 'Ibn Taimiyya on *Kalam* and *Falsafah*'.
7. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Quran*, p. 75. Also Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*.
8. Izutsu, *God and Man*, p. 130.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
10. 16:53-4. See also 31:32 and 29:65.
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12. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-8. Also Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 14, and W. Montgomery Watt, *Free-will and Predestination in Early Islam*, p. 19-20.
13. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
14. See Kung, *Does God Exist?* and Abul Kalam Azad, 'The Quranic Conception of God,' 7 pts., *Majallat al-Azhar*, 1 (December 1964), 1-3.
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16. 5:73; 16:51; etc.

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20. Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon*, s.v. 'Samad'. See also Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 11.
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27. 2:177; 35:28. See also Rahman, 'Some Key Ethical Terms of the Quran,' 165-85; Jafri, 'Particularity and Universality of the Quran with Special Reference to the Term *Taqwa*', and Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Quran*, pp. 177-83, 211-13.
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29. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 1.
30. Hodgson, *Venture* 1, 170.
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35. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:117.
36. For example, in 3:83; 57:1; 59:1.

37. Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 67-8.
38. Asad, *Message*, p. 653; Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'a.m.n'.
39. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 671; Azad, 'The Quranic Conception of God', pt.2:3.
40. 81:28-9. Also 76:29-30; 74:54-6.
41. 6:1007; also 10:99.
42. 2:142, 213; 4:175; 5:18.
43. 7:155; 13:27.
44. 2:20, 106, 109, 148, 248, 259; 3:26, 29, etc.
45. 3:154; 4:47; 7:54; 10:3, 31.
46. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar* 3:609.
47. 17:15; also see 20:134; 26:208; 28:59.
48. 6:54; 42:25; Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 19-20.
49. Watt, *Free-Will*, pp. 19-20.
50. *La ilah* here is the shortened form of the complete phrase: *La ilah ilal-lah* (There is no God except Allah).
51. Cited from Saiyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, p. 112.
52. Asad, *Message*, p. 8.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 731.
54. For *jinn*, see 6:100; 15:27; 34:41; angels (*al-malaika*), see 2:30-34.
55. 6:73; 2:117; 3:49, 59; 16:40.
56. 7:54; 10:3; 11:7.
57. Asad, *Message*, p. 211.
58. 10:5; 25:2; 36:37-40; 44:49.
59. 3:111; 38:27; 21:16.
60. Nasr, *Man and Nature*, p. 21.
61. 2:164; 3:140; 10:5-6, etc.; Nasr, *Man and Nature*, p. 21; Izutsu, *God and Man*, pp. 133-4.
62. 2:37; 66:12.
63. Kung, *Does God Exist?*, p. xxiii.
64. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, p. 90.
65. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart*, p. 49-51.
66. 14:32-3; 16:12-14; 22:65.
67. 17:44; 13:13; 24:41.
68. 7:56, 85; 5:35; Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 79.
69. Cited in Thomas, *Man in the Natural World*, pp. 17-18.
70. Nasr, *Man and Nature*, p. 20.
71. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 300-3.
72. Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad (Prime Minister of Malaysia), his address at the 39th session of the UN General Assembly, 10 December 1984, pp. 10-11.
73. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'shukr'. See also Saiyidain, 'The Quranic Invitation to Think', pp. 5-6.
74. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'israf'.
75. See also 6:131; 10:12, 23; 21:9; 26:151, etc.
76. 2:152; 11:9; 14:7-8; Izutsu, *Structure of Ethical Terms*, p. 183.
77. Jafri, 'Particularity and Universality of the Quran with Special Reference to the term *Taqwa*', p. 3; Rahman, 'Key Ethical Terms', p. 176.
78. Jafri, 'Particularity and Universality', p. 5.

79. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'taqwa'. See also Rahman, 'Key Ethical Terms', p. 176.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-9.
82. Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 106-120.
83. 2:62, 177; 5:69; 9:18, etc. Also the urge to be conscious of God is coupled with that of the Day of Judgment or meanings similar to it, as in 31:33; 58:9; 59:18.
84. Rahman, 'Key Ethical Terms', pp. 179-80.
85. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, p. 43.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
87. al-Taftazani, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, p. 21, also n. 19.
88. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p. 32.

3

The Islamic Attitude towards Knowledge and its Basic Sources

The Quran uses repetition in order to imbed certain key concepts deeply in the consciousness of its listeners. Hence, the words Allah (God) and Rabb (Lord Sustainer) are repeated 2,800 and 950 times respectively. The derivations of the root *-l-m*, excluding the unrelated *alam* (world) occur 750 times, thus ranking it third in numerical tabulation and importance. Thus Rosenthal concludes that: 'It is evident that the terms which were truly important to the Prophet did indeed occur in the Quran with greater frequency than all others.'¹

The concept of justice is also conveyed through synonyms such as *qist* (fairness), *qasd* (mean), *istiqama* (honesty), *wasat* (middle) and *mizan* (balance/impartiality). Justice is also emphasized through the use of its opposites, *ja'ar* (oppression/tyranny), *zulm* (wrong doing), *tughyan* (tyranny) and others, as Professor Khadduri points out. He has also suggested that 'second only to the existence of one God, no other religious or moral principles are more emphasized in the Quran and Traditions than the principle of uprightness, equity, and temperance . . .'.² This observation appears correct on two counts. Firstly, that the establishment of comprehensive justice follows logically and consistently from the weltanschauung that the Quran advocates, which is grounded deep in *ilm* (knowledge), *tawhid* (unity of God), *iman* (faith) and *taqwa* (consciousness of God).

Justice, for example, socio-economic justice, is considered so paramount to the meaning and so integrated into Islamic religious life that

the Quran, in an early Meccan *sura*, even equates worship of God in the face of lack of socio-economic empathy with sheer hypocrisy:

Didn't you see the one who denies religion [din]? Such is the one who repulses the orphan, and does not encourage the feeding the poor. So woe to the worshippers, who are neglectful of their prayers; those who [want but] to be seen [of men] but refuse [to supply even] the neighborly needs. (107:1-7)

And in other early Meccan *suras* also, the Quran equates the quest for a spiritual/religious 'steep path' (*al-aqaba*) with 'the freeing of the bondsman' (*fakku raqabatini*) which Muhammad Asad extends to all forms of bondage: physical, social, economic, and intellectual.³ This quest is also identified with the giving of food on the day of privation, to orphans who are near and the poor.

The centrality of justice was clearly manifested during the period when Muslims were not politically powerful and had no means of institutionalizing it. Indeed the major Quranic themes during the Meccan period were *tawhid*, social economic justice and human accountability on Judgment Day.⁴ And in the Medinan period, this emphasis on economic justice became more pronounced even towards enemies. Its relationship to *taqwa* is clear; *i'dilu, huwa aqrabu lil-taqwa* ('Be just! It is closest to God's consciousness') (5:8).

Secondly, the activities of the Prophet himself demonstrated the importance of justice.⁵ The *raison d'être* of his prophecy was that it constituted a 'mercy for the entire world' (21:107) by seeking to uplift and improve human conduct.⁶

It is indeed surprising then that a keen and capable scholar like Rosenthal should reach the conclusion that statistical frequency can be equated with lack of importance:

It is evident that the terms which were truly important to the Prophet do indeed occur in the Quran with greater frequency than all others. Vice versa, terms that expressed ideas which he did not consider vital elements of his preaching tend to appear low on the scale in the tabulation of words.⁷

Can we correctly infer that since the word *shura* and its verbal directives are mentioned only twice in the entire Quran (42:38 and 3:159), that Islam and Muhammad attached correspondingly little significance to it? Certainly not, for *shura* became the paramount

vehicle for collective decision-making practices by the Prophet in all matters on which the revelations were silent such as the choice of call to prayer, the decision prior to going to war at Uhud, or the peace negotiations with some of the Arab tribes during the difficult moments of the Battle of the Ditch.⁸

The frequency of appearance of the roots of a word (for example, *i-l-m*), is only one indication of the importance of a concept. Often the use of synonyms with many shades of meaning like *f-k-r* (to think), *f-q-h* (to understanding), *d-b-r* (to consider), (*a-q-l*) (to think), *f-h-m* (to understand),⁹ and antonyms such as *j-h-l* (to be ignorant) and the negation of synonyms (for example, *la yafqahun*, *la ya'qilun*) also emphasize the importance of this concept. Muslim scholars also tend to infer that the Quranic usage of certain objects or phenomena in oaths with the adjectival particle *wa* at the beginning of the *suras* (chapters) signifies its importance by drawing the addressees' attention to it and to a subsequently stated truth or evidence of the truth,¹⁰ such as in 52:1-3 'By the Mount (*Tur*) and by a scripture inscribed, on parchment unrolled . . . ' and in 68:1 'Nun, and by the pen and that which ye write therewith . . . '¹¹ In addition, the Quran also uses many words that denote objects employed in writing, such as *qalam* (pen); *raqq* and *qirtas* (parchment and paper); *marqum*, *mastur*, *mustatar*, *maktub*, *takhattuhu*, *tumla yumtala* (derivations from verbs meaning to write); *katib* (writer); *yamudduhu* (supplies it with ink); *kutub*, *suhuf* (books) and others.¹²

Professor Hamidullah makes the interesting observation that 'almost all the verse of the Quran in praise of, or in connection with learning and writing belong to the Meccan period, while the Medinan verses lay greater emphasis on action and performance.'¹³ In fact, in one Medinan *aya* in which *jihad* was commanded, it was stated that a certain group should be exempt from the duty of war to pursue a deep and comprehensive understanding of Islam so that they could teach the community (9:12).¹⁴

In the preceding pages I have discussed indirect indicators of the Quranic emphasis on knowledge; now I shall deal with the Islamic concept of knowledge in a direct manner. The emphasis on knowledge can be directly discerned from the elevated status accorded to those who seek, possess, teach and act upon it (the *ulama*). The Quran categorically dismisses any thought of equality between those who know and those who do not: 'Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: Are those who know not? But only men of understanding [*ulul albab*] will pay heed' (39:9). Positive fear of God which forms the central princi-

ples of Islamic religious life can be attained only by those who have knowledge (35:28) for they, together with the angels are able to testify to God's existence and unity (3:18) through the evidence of creation.¹⁵ Nobody except those with knowledge shall grasp the meanings of divine wisdom through similitudes (*amthal*) that God has coined for mankind (29:43).

Consequently, the prophets of God, who were the best of men, were all endowed with knowledge and wisdom. God taught Adam the nature of all things (2:32; 33:37) and He showed Ibrahim 'the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing certainty' (6:75). Lut (21:74), Yusuf (12:22), Musa (28:14), Dawud and Sulayman (27:15) were given knowledge and wisdom.

Isa was taught 'The Book and the Wisdom, and Torah and *Injil*' (34:48; 5:113) so that he might 'recite to you our signs, purify you and teach you the Book and the wisdom, and teach you what you did not know' (2:151). It should be noted that the knowledge vouchsafed to the prophets reflects the comprehensive and all-inclusive character of the Islamic concept of knowledge and prophecy. Beyond the revealed knowledge of the divine will and wisdom, certain prophets were specifically mentioned as having received unique abilities. For example, Yusuf was taught to interpret dreams (12:6; 101), Dawud was vouchsafed the art of making coats of mail (20:80) while Sulayman was endowed with knowledge of the language of animals (27:16-20).

Muhammad is unanimously held by all Muslims to be *al-nabi al-ummi*, the unlettered Prophet. Despite this, his *Sunna* is replete with aphorisms and actions that corroborate the Quranic concept of knowledge and became the impetus and motivating force for future intellectual and civilizational developments in Islam. The Prophet said that people are divided into scholars (*alim*) and students (*mutaallim*); the rest are savages or the rabble (*hamaj*).¹⁶ only the first two share in goodness.¹⁷ God and the entire cosmos including ants and fishes pray for the teachers of good.¹⁸ Scholars are heirs of the prophets¹⁹ whose ink will be weighted with the blood of martyrs on Judgment Day,²⁰ for the seeker of knowledge is truly exerting himself on the path of God.²¹ God will facilitate the way to Paradise for scholars.²²

The Prophet also said that the superiority of a scholar over a worshipper is like comparing the full moon with all other stars,²³ or the rank of Prophet Muhammad compared with the least of men.²⁴ A person who has an understanding of religion (*faqih*) is more formidable against Satan than a thousand worshippers.²⁵ Scholars—after the prophets, but before the martyrs—will intercede before God, on the

Judgment Day.³⁶ Beneficial knowledge, together with a charitable contribution that brings perpetual reward and pious offspring who pray for their parents, will provide everlasting good after death.³⁷ Ibn Maja (d. 830 CE) in his *Sunan* narrates that the Prophet is related to have said that the best form of worship is the pursuit of knowledge, and an hour of deep thinking is better than seventy years of worship, for worship without knowledge has no goodness in it, and knowledge without thinking about it also has no benefit.³⁸

Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon all Muslims from the cradle to the grave,³⁹ and it must be carried out even until China.⁴⁰ The *hadith* referred to above certainly has different degrees of reliability and some may be due to the process of backward projection as Rosenthal suggests.⁴¹ But they cannot be trivialized because these *hadiths* have had a tremendous influence upon an innumerable number of Muslims and have helped shape the spirit and character of Islamic civilization.

It is known that Muhammad, besides his duty of teaching the Islamic faith, assigned teachers to teach reading, writing, and calculation to the people. His emphasis on the acquisition of these tools of knowledge led him to offer to release any prisoners of war who would teach ten Muslim children to read and write. The Prophet's Mosque was connected to a building which served as a school and hostel for poor students and out-of-towners. Professor Hamidullah mentions that there were nine mosques in Medina during Muhammad's time that simultaneously served as schools.⁴²

The Quran as a Source of Knowledge

Everything that exists originates from God, including knowledge. He is the *Rabb* who comprehends all things. The concept of His Lordship includes the proper upbringing of His creatures by instituting within them certain mechanisms intrinsic to their natures or instincts as well as by direct revelation as in the case of man. Thus, the idea that He is the One who teaches Man is conveyed often (2:31; 55:2; 96:4-5; also 2:239; 5:1-4). In 55:1-4, the Quran says: 'The Beneficent has taught the Quran, He has taught him *al-bayy*an'.⁴³

Revelation (*wahy*), which all prophets received from the Divine source, is the most certain knowledge. The Quran also indicates that there exist other sources of knowledge, the proper study and orientation of which will complement the Truth of revealed knowledge; for ultimately they are derived from the same source: God, the Originator

of all things. However, because non-revealed knowledge is not directly bestowed by God to man and is vulnerable to methodological and axiological limitations, it does not carry the same status as *wahy*.

The other sources of knowledge are natural phenomena, human psychology, and history.⁴⁴ The Quran applies the term *ayat* to represent the first two categories and its own verses. The term *kalima* which is used to refer to the Quranic messages, is also extended in two places (18:109 and 31:27) to the entirety of God's creation. For example, in 31:26-7:

Unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Verily, God alone is Self-Sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due! And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas yet added to it, the words of God [*kalimat Allah*] would not be exhausted. For He is mighty, wise.

Logically, the term *kalima* here could not mean the words of the Quran, for obviously they are numerically limited to 114 chapters. Classical Quran commentators such as al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE) interpret this term to mean the 'wonders of God's work', which means the entire universe.⁴⁵

The usage of the *aya* for natural phenomena and human psychology can be attested by the following verse:

Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sends down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kind of beasts therein, and [in] the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth are signs [*ayat*] for people who use their senses [*Liquamin yaqilun*]. (2:164)

In time, we shall show them our signs [*ayatina*] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] [*fi al-afaq*] and within their inner selves. (41:53)

In reference to historical phenomena, the Quran never uses the term *aya*,⁴⁶ but rather the term *ibra* (lesson, guidance), from which moral lessons should be extracted. For example:

In their histories, there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding. It is not a narrative [*hadith*] that could be forged, but a

verification of what is before it, and a distinct explanation of all things, and a guide and a mercy to a people who believe. (12:111)

As a corollary to its divine authorship, the Quran, apart from pointing to the sources of knowledge external to it, is itself a major source of knowledge. Its references to the historical, metaphysical, sociological, natural, and eschatological phenomena and events must be necessarily true either literally or metaphorically. Muslims derive systems and subsystems of knowledge and culture from the Quran. The 'most authentic document' on the subject of sciences (for which the Quran is the catalyst) is to be found in Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi's *al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Quran* from which Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti obtained much of the materials for his *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, in which he stated that there were more than 3,000 systems of knowledge derived and systematized by Muslims from the Quran.³⁷ Basharat Ali maintains that there could be more:

Allamah Jalal-ud-Din [al-Suyuti] to my mind, has overlooked the predictive nature of the statement made in the *Qanun al-Ta'wil* by Qadi Abu Bakar bin al-Arabi, that Quranic systems of knowledge are 50, 400, 7000, and 70000 [in number]. This means by the token of the advancement of Islamic culture, the new generations, in accordance with the rate of intellectual advancement and in accordance with the unfolding of the Quranic culture, will have to discover, identify, systematize and synthesize ever new systems of knowledge.³⁸

The notion of the infinitude of Quranic wisdom and knowledge beyond the external traditional meanings, which God vouchsafes to deserving minds, is one of the main arguments used by al-Ghazali against the impermissibility of Quranic interpretation by personal opinion (*ray*). To buttress this notion, he quotes the Prophet as indicating that the Quran has a *zahir* (outward aspect), a *batin* (inward aspect), a limit and a prelude. He also quotes Ali bin Abi Talib as saying that he could certainly load seventy camels with the exegesis of the opening *sura* alone, adding that the *sura* itself is extremely short.³⁹

Historical Treatment

A brief mention was made in the first chapter of the methodology for understanding the Quran where the unitive socio-historical approach and the emphasis on letting the Quran explain itself were underscored.

Muhammad Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820 CE), who did pioneering work on the systemization of Islamic jurisprudence, dealt with mechanisms for understanding the Quran,⁴⁰ the most important of which is his categorization of the general (*amm*) and the specific (*khas*). Without his categorization confusion could arise through a literal interpretation of Quranic works.⁴¹ Professor Subhi al-Salih, the well-known Lebanese scholar, depending primarily on the work of Badr al-Din Muhammad ibn Abd Allah al-Zarkashi, (d. 1392 CE), *al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Quran* and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti's (d. 1505 CE), *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, indicates that this method was often used by classical commentators when they came across certain verses whose meanings would be much clearer when seen in conjunction with other verses.⁴² Several methodologies have been devised to realize this.

One deals with text (*mantuq*) and meaning (*mafhum*). *Mantuq* signifies the literal understanding of the text such as in 2:196 '... then a fast of three days during the pilgrimage and seven more when he returns; these are ten complete.' *Mantuq* also carries the obvious meaning as in: 'And He [God] is with you wherever you are' (57:4). Nevertheless, it is obvious this does not mean that God is physically present with us.⁴³ *Mafhum*,⁴⁴ according to classical *ulama*, is the intellectual understanding of a term or verse that is not literally indicated. It is divided into two.

Firstly, there is *mafhum muwajafa*, when a rule or meaning agrees with that of the text. This could be *fahwa al-khitab*, when the meaning points to something higher to be considered, as in *sura al-Isra*, verse 23, 'Do not say to both of them [your parents] "Uff"'. This verse indicates that hitting one's parents would constitute a heavier offence. Or it could be *lahn al-khitab* when the rule of *mafhum* agrees with that of the text, as in 4:10, 'Those who consume the property of orphans unjustly, surely they shall fill their bellies with fire and they will be placed in Hell.' This clearly shows what is forbidden.

Secondly, there is *mafhum mukhalafa*, when the implied meaning differs from the literal meaning of the text. It is divided into three main branches: First, is the descriptive (*wasfi*), which is categorized as follows:

1. attributive (*nat*) as in 49:6, in which Muslims are urged to ascertain news brought by the *fasiq* (evil doers). The *mafhum* here is that it is not necessary to do so if the bearer is *adil* (good, trustworthy);
2. state condition (*hal*) as in 4:43 where one is forbidden to pray while in a drunken state. The *mafhum* here is not only the gradual

censoring of alcoholic consumption for prayer, but its complete prohibition;

3. adverb (*zarf*) as in 2:198 where the pilgrims are asked to mention God's names in the *Mashar al-Haram* in a certain manner. The *mafhum* here is that ritual worship must be observed without any innovation;

4. a number (*ada*) as in 24:4 where the punishment of eighty lashes must be meted out to those who wrongly accuse good women of adultery. The *mafhum* is that the numerical specification is not to be altered.

The second main branch of *mafhum mukhalafa* is conditional disagreement (*mukhalafa shartiyya*), as in 65:6 where it is stated that it is obligatory to support a divorced wife who is pregnant. If she is not pregnant, then it is not obligatory though many scholars recommend it for a certain period: The third branch comprises limitational disagreement (*hasr*) as in 1:5: 'Ye [God] do we worship, from ye do we seek help'; this means that it is forbidden to worship or to seek the help of other than God.

Another methodological concept that classical interpreters used to understand the Quran by itself the deployment of the specific (*khass*) and general (*amm*). The general is understood as 'a certain word whose original linguistic meaning signifies inclusiveness of totality without any qualitative limitation'.⁴⁵ It is conveyed by indicators such as 'every', 'all', 'together' (*kull*, *jami*, and *kaffa*), definite articles, relative pronouns (*ism mausul*), plural relative pronouns in a genitive construction (*idafa*) and negation.⁴⁶ These indicators will give a general signification unless specified.

A specific rule or statement is one that basically indicates a single unit or a limited quantifiable entity such as one or two individuals or a tribe.⁴⁷ Most of the general rules or statements, with few exceptions, have been clearly specified. For example, in 2:234 it is written: 'Those women whose husbands are dead should restrain themselves (from marrying again for four months and ten days)' and this is a general rule. Exceptions are made, however, for pregnant divorcees or widows, whose waiting period is until delivery (65:4).⁴⁸ Specific rulings of the Quran as in the cutting off of the thief's hand (5:38), and feeding the poor to expiate unfulfilled oaths (5:89), for example, are fixed, according to classical interpreters.⁴⁹

Difficult or vague words or phrases (*mujmal*) are normally explained in the context of the verse or in the context of different verses (*mubayyin*).⁵⁰ Apparent contradictions are resolved in the case of gen-

eral verses by giving priority to the prohibitory verses over the permissibility ones. When they are of the same character the doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*) is appealed to.⁵¹

The classical doctrine of *naskh* is based on three Quranic verses: 'Such of Our revelations [aya] as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring [in place] one better or like thereof' (2:106); 'And when We put a revelation in place of [another] revelation and Allah knows best what He reveals—they say: verily, thou art but inventest it. Most of them know not' (16:101); and 'Allah effaces what He wills and establishes [what He wills] and with Him is mother of the Book (*umm al-Kitab*)' (13:39). Analysis of the context of these verses clearly indicates that the abrogation or effacement referred to was that of earlier prophets or messengers, not rules or verses of the Quran.⁵² Classical supporters of this doctrine have divided abrogation into three levels.

Firstly, there is the abrogation of the rule/judgment but not of the text, as with many rules or commands primarily of Meccan origin that were annulled in Medina. Then there is the abrogation of the text but not the ruling, as in the case of the 'lost verse of stoning for adultery' (*aya al-rajm*). Thirdly, there is the abrogation of both the text and the ruling as in the case where the Prophet was alleged to have recited praises for the Meccan idols in order to gain converts, which prompted a repudiation in 17:73–5.⁵³

The second and third levels of abrogation have been questioned by numerous scholars, for example, by Subhi al-Salih on the grounds that the proofs for these are limited to one or two illustrations only. In addition, they are based on *khabar ahad* (a *hadith* with a single chain of transmitter) which cannot be used as a *hujja* (firm argument) on matters of the revelation of the Quran and its abrogation. Also, there is a contradiction in the position: for example, some consider *aya al-rajm* to be a part of Sura *al-Nur* while others place it in Sura *al-Ahzab*.⁵⁴ Some classical scholars, such as Fakr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210 CE), al-Nawawi (d. 1277 CE) together with al-Mundhiri, al-Baihaqi and others, rejected the story of the Prophet praising the Meccan idols, even though other scholars like Musa b-Uqba, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn Hajr al-Asqalani accepted it as genuine.⁵⁵ These categories of abrogation can also be questioned because the second one implies the fatal neglect of God on an issue as important as the stoning of an adulterer; and the third one undermines strict monotheism, the commission of which is *shirk*, an unpardonable sin.⁵⁶ Category one—the abrogation of rulings or decisions of the Quran but not the text—is not only historically true but also necessary because the Quran was

revealed piecemeal to guide and inspire the ever-growing community of the first generation.⁵⁷ This meaning is supported by the fact that the Quran itself introduces its rules in a gradual manner, such as in the prohibition of alcohol consumption or *riba* (usury). However, absolute abrogation is caused by the irreconcilability of apparently contradictory verses of the Quran revealed at different periods of the Prophet's struggle.⁵⁸

Many scholars have too conveniently invoked the doctrine of abrogation; at one point there were 564 abrogated cases relating to the Quran! It is ironic that there is not a single authentic tradition from the Prophet that touches upon this notion of absolute abrogation. However, some companions and early authorities understood it in the sense of exception or particularization of meaning (*takhsis*) or clarification.⁵⁹ Classical scholars differ extensively on the number of abrogated verses. Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 927 CE), Fakr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210 CE), Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905 CE) and Rashid Rida (d. 1935 CE) seemed to hold that there is no abrogation in the absolute sense; al-Nahhas (d. 1010 CE) numbered the abrogated verses at one hundred, but al-Suyuti (d. 1505 CE) reduced these to twenty. Shah Waliy Allah (d. 1767 CE) maintained there were five and al-Shawkani (d. 1834 CE) declared that there were eight.⁶⁰

The acceptance of absolute abrogation of Quranic verses may subvert the universal applicability of Divine Wisdom which must transcend space and time. It also tends to indicate the lack of a systematic formulation of Quranic axiology according to a scale of Islamic priorities, and the absence of a comprehensive extraction of general ethico-moral principles from certain historically specific Quranic injunctions, so as to be relevant in other times and climes.⁶¹

Another mechanism invoked by classical interpreters 'to let the Quran interpret itself' is the doctrine of *nass* which is closely related to the dual concepts of *muhkamat* (clear verses) and *mutashabihat* (ambiguous verses).⁶² *Nass* literally means 'something clear' but theologically and judicially is 'the text which conveys only one meaning' or 'whose meaning is the text itself'.⁶³ It seems that Muhammad al-Shaybani (d. 804 CE), a student of Abu Hanifa, first used the term *nass* in his last work, *al-Siyar al-Kabir* (The Great Conduct), while earlier authorities used the term *al-Kitab* (the Quran) and *Sunna* (the conduct and sayings of the Prophet).⁶⁴ The *muhkam* verses, according to the great Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), contain messages that are clear in themselves and do not have more than one interpretation, but this Muhammad Asad considers 'too dogmatic'.⁶⁵ This seems to be true concerning the

definition of *nass*, because there are many interpretations on the so-called *nassi* and *muhkam* verses which include everything that is not *mutashabih*.

The *mutashabihat* are the ambiguous or allegorical verses that are traditionally understood to deal with the hidden, metaphysical themes such as the attributes of God, the ultimate meaning of time and eternity, the resurrection of the dead, from the realms of the *ghayb*.⁶⁶ The *aya muhkamat* is the 'essence of the divine writ' (*umm al-Kitab*) (3:7) because, according to Asad, 'they comprised the fundamental principles underlying the message, and in particular, its ethical and social teachings; and it is only on the basis on these clearly enunciated principles that the allegorical passages can be correctly interpreted'.⁶⁷ Ayoub notes that in this context some classical scholars even assert that the *muhkam* can abrogate the *mutashabih*.⁶⁸

The Quran is often interpreted by the deeds and sayings of Muhammad whose role as the transmitter and interpreter of the Quran is directly related to the office of prophethood. The Quran in many places ordered Muslims to obey God and Muhammad to the same degree and he is declared to be an excellent example to follow Muhammad's character when correctly conveyed by a tradition is the Quran.⁶⁹ al-Shafii gives a lengthy elucidation in which Muhammad's practices explain numerous injunctions of the Quran, either by way of particularization, qualification or exception.⁷⁰ Two examples will suffice to illustrate this: *sura* 4:12 indicates that a husband can inherit from a deceased wife after the settlement of any bequests and debts, but the *sunna* qualifies this by stipulating that any bequest could not exceed one-third of the estate, while payment of debt is the first priority in these transactions. And in 5:42, the *sunna* again qualifies the punishment of amputating the hands of thieves to cases of theft of well-protected property with a price of more than a quarter of a dinar.⁷¹

Under this category comes the number of prayers, amount of *zakat* payment and the time limit for payment. Muhammad also made decisions on situations that were not covered by the Quranic text, as in his deciding in favour of al-Zubayr in the latter's land dispute with a man.⁷² In problems such as these, the prophets relied on his *ijtihad*.

A further source of interpretation of the Quran frequently employed by classical *ulama* relied on the examples and opinions of those who lived in the time of Muhammad—his companions.

All the above are fundamental ingredients in the traditional methodology of Quranic interpretation and understanding. Fortunately or

unfortunately, almost all classical traditional exegesis of the Quran is based upon the thirty-volume work of Abu Jafar Muhammad al-Tabari (d. 923 CE),⁷³ which H. A. R. Gibb calls 'a monument of scholarly piety, unequalled in his time or his kind'.⁷⁴ al-Tabari brings together all the extant materials of traditional exegeses in his time with their different versions of contents and transmission chains (*isnad*). To illustrate a text, he provides simplifying paraphrases and lexical references, including various poems. However, some of his authorities are weak having derived much of their material from the people of the Book, and this material is therefore rejected by scholars as *isra'iliyat* or Jewish lore. Despite the fact that he does not acknowledge all the *isnads*, the scope of his materials and his general critical and evaluative approach are of great importance.⁷⁵

Non-traditional interpretations (that is, *tafsir bil-ray*) which are based on intellectual reasoning, speculation or mystical intuition, continue to be attempted despite general prohibition by the more conservative scholars. The cornerstone for the argument against any form of Quranic understanding and interpretation beyond *hadith* materials is the *hadith* in which the Prophet said: 'Whoever speaks concerning the Quran according to his own opinion [*bi-rayihi*], let him expect his seat in Hell.'⁷⁶ However, the seeds of this form of *tafsir* seem to have been sown in the earliest days of Islam. Certainly, the Quran itself, as I shall describe in some detail in the following chapter, tirelessly invites mankind to think and reflect upon its verses as well as on the natural, psychical and historical phenomena. So it is not surprising to find that the companions and early authorities often employed their independent reasoning (*ijtihad* or personal reasoning) to certain verses. For example, the prominent Mutazilite thinker, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144 CE), relates in his monumental *tafsir* that Aisha, and Muawiya (the founder of the Ummayyad Dynasty) described the Ascension of Muhammad to the Heavens as a spiritual journey; this idea runs counter to majority opinion. Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 720 CE), a scholar and a trustworthy traditionalist, interpreted 2:65 ('We said to them: Be as apes despicable!') in a non-literal way: that is, that the status of those who transgressed divine command would be reduced to that of animals, but they were not physically transformed into apes.⁷⁷ al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) is thus correct in his criticism of the traditionalist position in attacking *tafsir bil-ray* and deduction (*istinbat*). He proposed that one should not use the Quran to support preconceived ideas as may happen unconsciously where a verse may have two meanings, one of which closely corresponds to

one's preconceived views. Those who are not properly equipped with the knowledge of the Quran should refrain from interpreting it.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, al-Ghazali's fears were realized to an extent, as can be seen in the treatment of the Quran by different Muslim intellectuals, be they orthodox *Mutakallimun* (theologians), speculative sufis, rationalist *Mutazilite* theologians, philosophers, and the Shia.⁷⁹ However, this fact cannot distract us from appreciating the brilliant insights and positive contributions that some of these groups have made on different aspects of the Quran in their attempts to fathom its wisdom as well as to deal with the political-intellectual and spiritual problems of their time. Gatje is perhaps quite accurate in observing that while the interpretation of the Quran is not limited to comprehensive works of the commentaries, but is also to be found in theological, judicial and mystical works, nevertheless the appearance of the more significant Quran commentaries often marks the end or the high point of a theological development.⁸⁰

Attempts to derive inspiration from the Quran and prophetic tradition and then apply them to the entire spectrum of human experience are instigated by the Quran itself, which proclaims that it is an exposition for all things (*tibyan li kulli shay*), as guidance and mercy (16:89), in which nothing is neglected. The development of myriad branches of knowledge in Islam is ample testimony to this fact. Even as early as the thirteenth century there was some kind of scientific Quranic exegesis which certainly predates the impact of Western technology and scientific achievements on the Islamic world.⁸¹ Shara al-Din al-Mursi (d. 1275 CE) relates to the Quran not only the arts of astronomy, medicine, weaving, spinning, seafaring, and agriculture as practised during his time but also such skills as pearl-diving (by combining *suras* 38:37 and 16:14). This development, though not very common, fits well with the general development in law, philology, lexicography, and prophetic medicine.⁸² al-Ghazali, in his *Kitab Jawahir al-Quran*, underlines the importance of contemporary sciences in understanding the Quran: 'The Quran becomes transparent only to those who have studied the sciences, which are extracted from it.' For example, the meaning of *sura* 26:80, '... who, when I am sick, giveth me health' could not be properly understood without the knowledge of medicine. Similarly, the real meaning of the solar and lunar movements (55:5), the merging of the night into the day (35:13), and so forth, could be fully understood only by astronomers, thus affirming a complete harmony between many Quranic sciences and natural and positive sciences.⁸³

The subsequent mushrooming of modern scientific exegesis from the last half of the nineteenth century until the present should be viewed as a continuous development of creative activity. The appearance of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's (d. 1898 CE) six-volume exegesis of the first seventeen *suras* in 1880 is, according to J. M. S. Baljon, 'the initial date of *deliberate* modern Koran interpretation'.⁸⁴ In 1880 also, an Egyptian physician named Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Iskandari published a book entitled *Kashf al-Asrar al-Nuraniyya al-Quraniyya* (The Unveiling of the Luminous Secrets of the Quran). Jensen thought that he was 'the first Koran interpreter who treats of non-Arab occidental sciences in his Koran commentary'.⁸⁵ The works of Sheikh Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905), Tantawi Jawhari (d. 1940), Ghulam Ahmad Parwez (d. 1908),⁸⁶ Muhammad Farid Wajdi (d. 1940) also played a prominent part in popularizing the scientific interpretation of the Quran. According to Jensen, Farid Wajdi's commentary of the Quran is possibly 'one of the earliest Koran commentaries in which modern natural history is just one aspect of Koran interpretation'. The works of Dr Abd al-Aziz Ismail, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Mustafa Sadiq al-Rifi, or Hanafi Ahmad were devoted exclusively to this kind of exegesis.⁸⁷

Basically, this genre of *tafsir* gives the Muslim community encouragement in that it is evident that their religion, because it originates from God, not only provides guidance for socio-moral and spiritual life but also for all realms of human endeavour, including science and technology. It is both a process of action and reaction. It acts upon the intellectual malaise and conservatism that arrested the development of the Muslim *umma* and which ultimately made it incapable of resisting the imperialistic onslaughts of the West. Western administrators, scholars, and missionaries pointed to the inadaptability and inflexibility of Islam and its institutions and this induced an apologetic response in some of these Muslim authors.

However, the ease with which many of these writers 'reconcile' modern scientific discoveries, observations or even theories with the Quranic dicta—from the Muhammad Abdu's classic equation of *jinn* with microbes, to Muhammad al-Banna's reading of aeroplanes in 17:1, artificial satellites in 41:53, and interplanetary travel in 55:33—must have surprised many a Westerner in the light of the difficulties Western Christianity and the Church has had with science since the days of Galileo.⁸⁸ The easy and attractive, albeit sometimes bizarre, approach of these Muslims should not, however, be trivialized by labelling it as apologetic because their contributions have often been positive.⁸⁹

Their ideas gave Muslims confidence since they could show that the Quran contains progressive elements that the superior West has only recently discovered. Furthermore, these efforts excite the educated Muslims minds to go back to religious sources for a reassertion of their intellectual, cultural, and historical identity. It is not a coincidence that the current defiant attitude of Islamic revivalism has its immediate roots in the works of modernist thinkers and apologists, in the scientific, political, or cultural fields, such as in the above mentioned works, or those of Muhammad Iqbal, Sayyid Ameer Ali, and numerous others. Admitting their lack of systemization and, with few exceptions, their lack of intellectual originality, these efforts, in a sense, follow the earlier endeavours of the Muslim *falasifa*, *mutakallimun*, and *sufis* in dealing with the intellectual and spiritual challenges facing them. Although it has been pointed out by many scholars that none of these groups has done total justice to the true *weltanschauung* of the Quran.

However, the criticisms of the Egyptian scholar, Amin al-Khuli, that this genre is philologically unsound because the Quran addressed the Arab contemporaries of Muhammad and thus cannot contain anything that they would be unable to understand, should not be accepted *in toto* either.⁹⁰ al-Khuli's observations are not valid for several reasons. Firstly, it is a historical fact that the companions and the People of the Book asked the Prophet the meanings of certain things.⁹¹ This means that even the Prophet's contemporaries did not understand the Quran without the Prophet's guidance. Secondly, certain Quranic statements, particularly on scientific matters such as the detailed accounts of the physiological development of the human embryo, the creation, astronomy, the explanation of certain matters concerning the animal and vegetable kingdoms, accord completely with the modern scientific *facts*, certainly indicate that this kind of information could not have been fully understood at the time of revelation.⁹²

The Quran (36:36) in mentioning the existence of couples or polarities in all creations alludes to the fact that man during the Prophet's time did not know certain aspects of creation.⁹³ 'Glory be to Him Who has created opposites in whatever the earth produces, in men's own selves, and in that of which they have no knowledge.' The full wisdom of the decree forbidding the consumption of alcohol and gambling—because their evil is greater than their good (2:219)—could not have been comprehended as fully by the Prophet's companions as by us today.

The Prophet as a Source of Knowledge

In our previous discussion on the methodology of classical interpretation of the Quran, the role and function of the Prophet as the interpreter *par excellence* was briefly mentioned. Muhammad is called 'an excellent example' (*uswa hasana*) by the Quran (33:21) as was Ibrahim and those who were with him (60:4, 6). The elevated status of the Prophet Muhammad as the model of the highest Islamic socio-moral piety and the leader of the community has been consistently supported by the Quran: 'Say [O Muhammad], "If you [all] love God, then follow me . . ."' ; 'Say [O Muhammad]: Obey God and His Apostle' (3:31-32; 4:58; 5:59, etc.). al-Shafii said that those who were learned in the Quran in his times equated wisdom—which appears in conjunction with the mentioning of the Book of God—with the *Sunna* of the Prophet.⁹⁴ This is expressed in several places including 2:146:

And also we have sent among you an Apostle, one of yourselves, to recite to you Our signs, and purify you, to teach you the Book and the Wisdom, and to teach you what you did not know.⁹⁵

It was natural for Muslim contemporaries of the Prophet to consult him on all matters of concern and abide by his orders and suggestions. But it is widely known that on several occasions they tried to distinguish between Muhammad's personal opinions and revelation. For example, al-Hubab b. al-Mundhir asked the Prophet if his decision to camp before the battle of Badr was based on God's command or whether it was a matter of opinion and military strategy. When the Prophet affirmed that the latter was the case, al-Hubab suggested a better strategy with which the Prophet concurred.⁹⁶

The question arises as to what status should be accorded to the Prophetic *Sunna*. What imperative does knowledge obtained from authentic traditions of his conduct and sayings carry? The answers to these questions are particularly important to modern Muslims in the wake of the spirited resurgence of movements which are seeking to return to the Quran and *Sunna*. Already we have observed the prevalence of certain groups who maintain that Muslims should follow *everything* that the Prophet and his companions did—including eating with three fingers and using *miswak* (a toothbrush made from a sweet-smelling tree-branch).⁹⁷ Another student group, when reviewing a speech by a well-known Southeast Asian Muslim scholar, Cesar Adib

Majul, were shocked to find that he had mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad was not sent to be a military general, but a prophet; hence he was not to be judged in the former category.⁹⁸ Another prominent group, the Darul Arqam of Malaysia, follow the *Sunna* keenly. Not only do they wear Arab-style robes and headgear and promote polygamous marriages, but they have recently revived the *Sunna* of horse-riding by buying nine polo horses for which every member is requested to pay twenty-five dollars a year.⁹⁹

It is not my intention here to go into the nature of prophecy in Islam, which has been hotly debated by Muslim theologians and philosophers, particularly on the issues of selection for prophetic office and the possibility of supernatural miracles.¹⁰⁰ My primary interest is to examine the nature and extent of the relevance and normativeness of the *Sunna* as a source of knowledge and guidance. Naturally, I shall look at the nature of prophetic knowledge and the concept of *isma* (immunity from error).

The Quran is replete with reminders that Muhammad (like all prophets) was merely a *man* whose distinction, apart from his naturally good disposition, was that he was the recipient of revelation (17:93; 18:110; 41:6). He did not have any power to benefit or harm anybody, nor did he possess powers of the unseen (7:188; 10:49; 6:35; 17:75, 86; and 72:21). How reliable and normative then would be the knowledge of the Prophet beside that of revelation (the Quran)? Could he have been mistaken in matters not pertaining to revelation?

It was natural for the companions to ask the Prophet for guidance, and they obeyed his decisions and suggestions; but I have also noted that they made a clear distinction between his personal and his revelatory speech. While many of them copied or memorized the Quran, very few wrote down a compilation of the Prophet's non-revelatory personal speech, although they must have obviously memorized and internalized the conduct and sayings of their beloved leader and Prophet of God.

al-Shafii maintains that the Prophet's knowledge consists of revelation that is recited (the Quran), and that which is not recited (in the form of *Sunna*).¹⁰¹ The latter explain the former and also take on an obligatory status. However, a distinction should be made between those aspects that cannot be correctly understood by human minds such as those limited to matters of belief and ritual worship as well as principles of socio-ethical conduct and fields of human cognition and experience that are open to further knowledge. Thus, Shah Waliy Allah, for example, divides the prophetic sciences into two. First is the

knowledge that serves to propagate the message, which includes the sciences for the next life and the wonders of the *malakut*, all of which are direct results of revelation. It also includes divine laws, the setting down of which are based on revelation, while others are based on the Prophet's *ijtihad* (personal intellectual reasoning). But this *ijtihad* at the level of revelation, for the Prophet was protected from error. Moreover, his *ijtihad* was not based on any textual evidence because he had already been taught 'the goals of the law and precepts of the legislation and the orders'. In this category are the rules that are not tied to any general principles, and the general salutary purposes and practical virtues.¹⁰²

The second category of prophetic sciences, according to Shah Waliy Allah, is that which is not related to the propagation of the message. He quoted two sayings of the Prophet Muhammad: 'I am only a man, and when I order you with something according to my own opinion, then I am only a man.' The other supporting *hadith* is that relating to the well-known case of his failed advice against artificial pollination of date-palms: 'I only thought a thought, so don't blame me for that idea, but if I tell you something about Allah, then accept [it], for I will never lie about God.' His opinions on these matters were based on experience, custom, and exigent considerations (such as medicine and military strategy). This also includes certain rulings and particular decrees (for example, in social arbitration) in which the Prophet would make decisions based on evidence presented to him.¹⁰³

Shah Waliy Allah's description of the first category of prophetic sciences as they are compiled in *hadith* is similar to al-Shafii's description of *Sunna* as the interpretation of the Quran. Indeed, according to Sa'ad al-Din al-Taftazani (d. 1386 CE), there is an overwhelming consensus among Muslims that it is impossible for the Prophet to commit any major errors in areas pertaining to the laws, judgment and guidance. All prophets, by the internal logic of their function, are preserved from errors in this category. Any news regarding falsehood and/or disobedience on their part is to be rejected if recorded by individual traditions, or interpreted away from the literal meaning if recorded in *ta'awut* traditions (those with continuous and numerous chains of transmission), if possible. Otherwise it is to be explained as a case of doing the lesser of two evils, or as something that happened before their mission.¹⁰⁴ Using this method, Prophet Musa's (Moses) accidental killing of a man before he was elected for prophetic office can be seen in its proper perspective.¹⁰⁵ The idea of *isma* seems to be systematically developed in the theological tract, *Fiqh Akbar 11*,

attributed to Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 767 CE). The eighth article of this tract stipulates that all prophets are immune from all sins but they may stumble or make mistakes.¹⁰⁶ The areas in which they may err are certainly not those that would compel people to forsake them (like debauchery, unbelief, vices, and petty sins like stealing or giving short measure).¹⁰⁷ Shah Waliy Allah places these in the second category of prophetic sciences—sciences where there exists the possibility of error but which do not hinder the essential authority and dignity of the message. However, the prophets, being human, are not free from the motivation to err or from reaching the brink of an error. This can be seen from the evidence of the Quran itself as well as in the record of the prophetic struggle. Let us take the case of the Prophet Muhammad himself.

From the internal evidence of the Quran itself (with the assistance of 'occasions of revelations', it is quite apparent that the Prophet Muhammad was corrected on several occasions, all of which emphasize his humanity. For example, in his eagerness to succeed in his message, he ignored Abd al-Allah ibn al-Maktum over an important Quraish elite (80:1–10). On another occasion, he was tempted to compromise with the Quraish in order to gain their conversion (68:9; 17:73, 73–5); and in his tenderness he chose to obtain ransom for his prisoners from the battle of Badr rather than kill them (8:67).

It is well known that he sought the counsel of his companions in war matters at Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, as well as in the determination of the specific Muslim prayer-call. In judging between contending parties, he seemed to indicate that he based his decisions upon evidence and testimony available to him. Therefore he urged those involved to be truthful and sincere in their testimony.¹⁰⁸ As ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE) and Shah Waliy Allah (d. 1767 CE) have indicated, the Prophet's utterances and practices on medicine (as found in the collection of *tibb nabawi*) are based mostly on Arab customs, and not revelation.¹⁰⁹ The Prophet also made sharp observations on the practices of the Romans and Persians on family matters. In the *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 875 CE), the second most authoritative *hadith* collection after the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari (d. 870 CE), the Prophet calmed down a man who feared that his practising *azl* (*coitus interruptus*) might harm his wife, by remarking: 'If it is harmful, certainly it would [also] have harmed the Persians and the Romans.'¹¹⁰ It is also narrated that Prophet initially intended to forbid the practice of *ghila* (having sexual intercourse with a pregnant wife) fearing that it might affect the offspring, but refrained from forbidding it upon observing that no

harmful effects ensued when the Persians and Romans practised it.¹¹¹ It seems safe to deduce that the Prophet's decisions to forbid or approve of certain practices for the health and general welfare of his *umma* depended on the prevailing ideas of his time and his assessment concerning them.

In the categories of human affairs outside belief, ritual worship, and principles of ethico-moral conduct, the prophets were liable to make mistakes which would not warrant God's interference. This so-called non-religious realm, for lack of a better term (since there is no water-tight compartmentalization between the religious and the worldly in Islam), includes such diverse fields such as medicine, civil administration, crafts, agriculture, judicial matters, diplomatic and military affairs.¹¹² The Prophetic practices and utterances in these matters are regarded as beneficial not in the literal sense, but in our fathoming the purposes of a superior social leader. The fact that some or many of the *Sunna* in these areas may not be literally applicable does not in any way reduce the authority of the Prophet's personality and teachings.

Shah Waliy Allah alludes to the primary objectives of prophecy and the realities of his immediate audience when he states that prophetic conduct was concerned only with spiritual upliftment and proper community development; not with the explanation for atmospheric events like rain and eclipses, the cause of daily events and even history and geography. Moreover, the existence of a unique genre of *hadith* called *hadith qudsi*, whose contents are directly inspired by God to the Prophet who in turn articulated them in his own words, testify to the fact that there is a major distinction within prophetic sayings.¹¹³ The contents of *hadith qudsi* consists primarily of exhortations that were almost exclusively concerned with practical aspects of religious life and its duties, the love of man for God and vice-versa, the need to beseech God's help and His forgiveness, and the proper attitude of Muslims towards God.¹¹⁴

It is for these reasons that scholars like Ibn Khaldun, Qadi Iyad, the prominent Maliki Jurist of Spain (d. 1149 CE), the Mutazilite Qadi Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025 CE), Shah Waliy Allah, Muhammad Abu Zahra and Muhammad Sulayman al-Ashqar generally hold this view. These scholars did not question the authenticity of *hadith* in these categories as long as they passed the normal *isnad* criticisms. However, they did not consider that these practices or sayings of the Prophet carry normative obligations.¹¹⁵ Ibn Khaldun, while speaking of prophetic medicine transmitted through a sound tradition, stressed its

non-scientific nature and dismissed its obligatoriness, but pointed out that it might be beneficial if applied with deep faith.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, Rashid Rida (d. 1935) proposed that many traditions of sound *isnads* ought to be submitted to a renewed textual criticism because *isnad* criticism alone was insufficient.¹¹⁷

Certainly, the concept of checking important information in Islam exists in the Quran itself as indicated by 49:6, 'O ye who believe! If an evil man comes to you bringing a news, then check it or verify it.' Classical interpreters add the qualification that if a truthful person brings the news, then there is no necessity to verify it.¹¹⁸ Perhaps this stimulated the *muhaddithun* to place heavier emphasis on *isnad* criticism, that is, on the chain of transmission and quality of transmitters compared to the textual (*matn*) criticism. During the time of the Prophet and immediately after, close companions like Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali and Aisha, and Abu Hurairah were already practising an informal form of checking by questioning and confirming with the Prophet, or comparing with each other. This method involved comparisons between *hadith* of different students of one scholar, statements of a single scholar at different times, the written documents and oral tradition and the related *hadith*, and the relevant text of the Quran.¹¹⁹ Formal and systematic science of *hadith* criticisms developed only in the early third century AH/ninth century CE.

The critical investigation of *isnad* caused *hadith* scholars (*Muhaddithun*) to travel far and wide, not only to ascertain the names and relevant biographical data of the authorities in order to investigate when and where they lived, and their mutual acquaintances, but also to test their truthfulness and accuracy in textual transmission to ensure their reliability. This is called *al-jarh wal-tadil* (wounding and authentication). The 'knowledge of transmitters' became eminently important in this science, and numerous works, called *tabaqat* have been devoted to the lives of classical scholars.¹²⁰ *Hadith* are therefore graded according to the authority of the continuity of their transmissi-
 onal lines and the reliability of their transmitters. The following categories are classified according to their transmissi-
 onal chain:¹²¹

1. *Mutawatir*: a *hadith* transmitted by numerous chains of transmission, anywhere from four to several hundreds. They have attained a status of certainty because it is inconceivable that people could agree on a lie. *Mutawatir* by wording is very few; the majority of *mutawatir* are by meaning, (i.e. all chains of transmission carry the same meaning even with different wording);

2. *Mashhur* (well-known): a *hadith* which is transmitted by three or more reliable people at every stage;

3. *Aziz*: a *hadith* transmitted by at least two reliable transmitters in any generation, but not as widely disseminated as in the first two categories;

4. *Gharib*: in general, a rare tradition with a single transmitter either through its *isnad*, after a companion, or at any stage;

5. *Ahad*: a *hadith* with a single transmitter. Some scholars like Azami and Siddiqi include in *ahad* traditions *hadith* having one to four transmitters in the first three generations. The *mutawatir* and *mashhur* traditions are recognized by all schools of thought to be the second most important source of knowledge in Islam. The *ahad* traditions are accepted as being superior to analogy by all major Sunni schools apart from the Malikis.¹²² Hanafis also reject *ahad hadith* if it contradicts certain *Sharia* principles derived from an accepted Quranic or *hadith* text. The acceptability however, depends on the transmitter; he or she should be a Muslim of sound mind, trustworthy, and well-known for accuracy, and the *hadith* should be corroborated by reason;¹²³

6. *Marfu* is a tradition that goes back to the Prophet, but the *isnad* is broken;

7. *Mauquf hadiths* go back to the generation of the companions, while *maquf* to the successor only;

8. *Mursal* is a tradition whose transmitter jumps from the successor directly to the Prophet, dropping the companions. *Mu'allaq* has an *isnad* which omits one or more authorities, specifically called *munqati* if one is missing, *mu'dal* if two are missing;

9. *Mu'an'an*: an *isnad* which uses the term *an* indicating the lack of explicit method of *hadith* reception;

10. *Musalsal* is a tradition whose transmitters have a similar background or did similar things while narrating.¹²⁴

A *hadith* is accepted (*maqbul*) either as *sahih* (authentic), or *hasan* (agreeable/beautiful) or *mardu'd* (rejected). A *sahih* tradition should possess an uninterrupted *isnad*, should not be isolated (*shadh*) and/or should not have any hidden defect such as a trustworthy scholar's attributing a companion's tradition to a prophetic one.¹²⁵ A *sahih hadith* should also not contradict the general Islamic weltanschauung. If a *hadith* is not totally faultless, for example, if its *isnad* is not totally complete or there is disagreement on the reliability of its authorities, then it is called *hasan*. If there is serious doubt about discontinuity in the narration, or *isnad* or other complexities, then the *hadith* is called

weak (*daif*). Weak *hadiths* may be accepted if they are corroborated by stronger *hadith*. *Hadiths* that are totally unacceptable are spurious ones narrated by liars and forgers.

The genuineness of the *isnad* still does not guarantee textual reliability. This fact is recognized by classical traditionalists; for example, Ibn al-Jauzi (d. 1020 CE) and Abu Bakr b. al-Tayyib (d. 1013 CE). Ibn al-Jauzi, as quoted by al-Suyuti in his *Tadrib al-Rawi* said: 'If you find a *hadith* contrary to reason, or to what has been established to be correctly reported, or against accepted principles, then you should know that it is forged.' Ibn al-Tayyib suggests that the signs of forged *hadith* are that they offend reason and common experience, or they are contrary to explicit Quranic text, or the *mutawatir* traditions or consensus. Other signs of forged *hadith* include a single report about an eminently public event, or *hadith* stipulating severe punishments for minor faults, or promises of high rewards for insignificant deeds.¹²⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyya would in addition reject a *hadith* with an 'inadequate' style or if it 'sounds like the sayings of mystics or medical practitioners'.¹²⁷ Siddiqi also rejects those *hadith* that talk about the virtues of certain Quran chapters, persons, tribes, or particular places, as well as those with detailed prophecies of future events and dates.¹²⁸

Thus, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, which is considered the most authoritative and scrupulous collection of authentic *hadiths* and ranks second only to the Quran according to the majority of Muslims, contains *hadiths* that have been rejected by prominent scholars. For example, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 1449 CE) rejected a *hadith* indicating Adam's height to be sixty yards on the basis of archaeological or historical fact. The Quranic injunction in 49:9—'And if two parties of believers fall into fighting, then make peace between them'—was interpreted by a *hadith* as referring to the quarrel between the faction of Abd Allah b. Ubayy and the Prophet's companions. However, this was rejected on historical grounds by Ibn Battal because at the time of the revelation of this *aya*, Abd Allah had not yet accepted Islam; even outwardly. al-Nawawi, Ibn Abd al-Barr, Ibn al-Athir and al-Shaukani all rejected a *hadith* which predicted that had Ibrahim, the only son of the Prophet, lived, he would have been a prophet. Also, Ibn Hajar reports that al-Isma'ili rejected a *hadith* which stated that the Prophet Ibrahim prayed on the Day of Judgment: 'O Lord, Thou hast promised that thou would not humiliate me on the Day of Judgment.'¹²⁹ Ahmad Ibn Ali al-Jassas (d. 981 CE), a celebrated Hanafi jurist, rejected a *hadith* in al-Bukhari which supported the existence of sorcery. He said that it

was a fabrication because the Quran in 20:69 indicates the non-reality of sorcery,¹³⁰ and that the traditions suggesting that the Prophet had been affected by a witch are baseless.¹³¹ According to the Quran, sorcery has a psychological efficacy, not a concrete one.¹³² Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and others rejected a *hadith* considered genuine by others concerning the Prophet's alleged praise of the Meccan idols while reciting the Quran to the polytheists. The orthodox scholar Taqi al-Din ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328 CE) rejected what was most probably a Sufi *hadith* ('he who loved, kept clean, and died, is a martyr') with the remark that even if the *isnad* were as bright as the sun, it would still be wrong and fictitious.¹³³

It seems that classical *ulama* and traditionalists had viable criteria for evaluating both the *isnad* and *matn* (textual contents of *hadith*), as described earlier. Unfortunately, the over-emphasis on the authority of *isnad*, and the lack of proper analysis of prophetic sciences (with the exception of perhaps Ibn Khaldun and Shah Waliy Allah), led to the criteria established for *matn* criticism oftentimes becoming entangled, and opposing reason, experience, and historicity. As in the case with the Quran, the modern hermeneutical methods that need to be developed do not necessarily have to be totally independent of the classical efforts, rather, they should provide valuable sources of references in this endeavour. If the great al-Ghazali, in defending the right of disinterested and non-traditional *tafsir*, rejected the normativeness of earlier authorities, then the authorities that come later could be referred to, but do not necessarily carry normative status as well. It is in this spirit, that Shah Waliy Allah's method of Quranic studies—the first that required the Quran to be studied by itself independently of any *tafsir* that was utilized as secondary material—is truly profound.¹³⁴ Professor Fazlur Rahman, in his call for a new methodology of hermeneutics on the Quran, carries the Shah's initiative several steps further. In *Islam and Modernity* he points out that the classical Quranic exegesis may contain pearls of insight and historical information, but as a whole 'impedes rather than promotes a real understanding of the Quran'.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, he recommends that the efforts of historic Islam be not ignored because they gave continuity to the intellectual and spiritual being of the Muslim *Umma*. However in order to advance forward, it is necessary that all efforts of historic Islam must be judged by the Quran, which should be understood in the context of its socio-historical milieu and its general weltanschauung.

Notes

1. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 21. He also mentions that the 'auxiliary verb *k-w-n* occurs over 1,300 times, and the unavoidable *q-w-l* is found almost 1,700 times, and . . . the root *a-m-n* is found a few times more than 'a-l-m'. This, however, takes into account not only the meaning of 'to believe' but requires inclusion of the occurrences of the root in the basic conjugation, where the meaning is very different'.
2. Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, pp. 10–11. See also Rahman, 'Islam and the Problem of Economic Justice'; al-Sibai, *Ishirakiyya al-Islamiyya*; Qutb, *al-Adalah al-jihima 'iyah fi l-Islam*.
3. Asad, *Message*.
4. See for example, Rahman, 'Islam and the Problem of Economic Justice', and *Major Themes*.
5. See Khadduri, *Islamic Conception of Justice*, and al-Sibai, *al-Ishirakiyya*.
6. A *hadith* from the Prophet quoted in Khadduri, *Islamic Conception of Justice*, p. 9. The speech of Jafar ibn Abi Talib to the Negus of Ethiopia in the first migration in the early years of the Meccan period testifies to the basic purpose of his mission: 'He (i.e., Muhammad) summoned us to acknowledge God's unity and to worship Him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kindly hospitality, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and speak lies, and to devour the property of orphans, to vilify chaste women.' See Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, pp. 151–2.
7. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 21.
8. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat*, pp. 234–5, 371, 457; al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*, 1:332.
9. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*.
10. al-Sibai, *Ishirakiyya*; see also Asad, *Message*; Hamidullah, 'Educational System in the Time of the Prophet'; and al-Sabuni, *Safwa*.
11. The disjointed (*muqatta*) letter *nun*, according to some earlier commentators signifies a great fish or a ray of light, or an ink-pot, see al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar* 3:352. Asad, in *Message* however, cites the interpretations of prominent theologians who generally consider these letters as part of the mystery of the Quran.
12. Hamidullah, 'Educational System'.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.
14. For the detailed conceptual exposition of the term *al-Din*, see the work of the most outstanding Malaysian scholar of Islam, al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, in which he discusses the interrelationship between the ideas of indebtedness, submissiveness, judicious power and natural inclination within the concept of *al-Din*. Smith, in *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, meticulously traces the shifts and developments in the meanings of the term *al-Din* from major Quran commentaries throughout the ages as it relates to the concept of Islam.
15. al-Sabuni, *Safwa*.
16. A *hadith* cited in Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education*.
17. A *hadith* in the *Muhadarat al-Udaba* by al-Isfahani, cited in Shalaby, *Muslim Education*, p. 162.

18. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, see al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*.
19. al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Ilm*, hereafter cited as *The Book of Knowledge*.
20. ibn Abd al-Barr, *Jami al-Ilm*; al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*.
21. *Hadith* narrated by al-Tirmidhi and Darimi, cited by al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*, I:36.
22. *Hadith* narrated by Muslim, cited by al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*, I:127.
23. Narrated by ibn Maja, cited by al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*.
24. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, cited by al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*. al-Ghazali comments: 'See how he [i.e. the Prophet] placed knowledge on equal footing with prophecy and belittled the value of practice without knowledge, despite the fact that the worshipper may not be ignorant of the worship which he observes.' *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 13.
25. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi and ibn Maja, cited by al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*, and al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*.
26. Narrated by ibn Maja, cited by al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*.
27. Narrated by Muslim, cited by ibn Abd al-Barr, *Jami Bayan al-Ilm*, al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*.
28. Cited in Saiyidsin, 'Quran's Invitation to Think'.
29. ibn Abd al-Barr, *Jami Bayan al-Ilm*. al-Tabrizi remarks that 'this is *hadith* the text of which is quite well known but the change of transmission is weak.' al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*, I:136.
30. Cited by Shalaby, *The History of Muslim Education*.
31. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*. Rahman, in *Islamic Methodology in History*, upholds the positive value of even non-historical traditions. Gibb stresses the valuable information that such traditions can provide on the historical development of Islam. See Gibb, *Mohammedanism*.
32. Hamidullah, 'Educational System'.
33. In this context the term *al-bayan* means thought and speech. Asad, *Message*, p. 824.
34. See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; reprint ed., Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), pp. 96, 126-28; M. M. Sharif, 'Fundamental Teachings of the Quran,' *History of Muslim Philosophy*, 2 vols., ed. by M. M. Sharif (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), I:147-49; Fazlur Rahman, 'The Quranic Solutions of Pakistan's Educational Problems,' *Islamic Studies* 6 (April 1967), 317-18.
35. al-Sabuni, *Safwa*. See also al-Ghazali, *Kitab Jawahir al-Quran*.
36. The only place where the term *aya* appears with possible historical significance is in 14:5: 'Bring forth [O Moses] thy people from darkness into light and remind them of the days of God [ayyam Allah]. In these are surely signs [ayat] for every steadfast, grateful one.' al-Tabari interprets the term *ayyam Allah* to mean favours of God. Asad argues that in the Quran, it usually means God's final judgment on man, on the day, or resurrection.
37. Ali, 'The Quranic Contributions to Sociology and Cultural Sociology'. al-Ghazali in *Jawahir* emphasizes and elaborates upon the vastness and depths of the reservoir of Quranic sciences; the real understanding of some of whose verses needs to be complemented with a good understanding of God's works which is extra-Quranic.
38. Ali, 'The Quranic Contributions', pp. 165-7.
39. Abu Quasem, *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Quran*.
40. al-Shafii, *Risala*.
41. Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*.
42. al-Salih, *Mabahith fi Ulum al-Quran*.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 385-86.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 386-91.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 391.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-93.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
48. Riaz ul-Hasan Gilani, *The Reconstruction of Legal Thought in Islam*; with a foreword by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, Lahore, Idara Tarjuman al-Quran, 1977, pp. 59-60.
49. al-Salih, *Mabahith*, pp. 396, 398.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-400.
51. Gilani, *Reconstruction*, p. 60; al-Salih, *Mabahith*, pp. 328-52, and Hasan, *Early Development*, pp. 60-85.
52. Hasan, *Early Development*, pp. 70-72. Also Asad, *Message*, p. 23, n. 87.
53. See Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 88-90; Hasan, *Early Development*, pp. 60-63; al-Salih, *Mabahith*, p. 337.
54. al-Salih, *Mabahith*, pp. 337-8, n. 32.
55. Hasan, *Early Development*, p. 62.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 63; also Rahman, 'Islamic Theory of Knowledge'.
57. See Mohmoud Ayoub, *The Quran and Its Interpreters*, Albany: New York State University of New York Press, 1984, (multi-volume forthcoming) 1:19-20; who writes: 'An even closer expression of the Quran's involvement in the daily life and problems of human society is the principle of *naikh* . . . that the Quran has had to meet the exigencies of the daily life of the community even in its formative and final structure.'
58. Asad, *Message*, p. 23, n. 87; also Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 89-90.
59. Hasan, *Early Development*, pp. 65-7.
60. Aboebakar, *Sejarah al-Quran*.
61. al-Faruqi, 'Towards a New Methodology for Quranic Exegesis'; Rahman, 'Towards Reformulating the Methodology of Islamic Law'; Rahbar, 'The Challenge of Modern Ideas and Social Values to Muslim Society'.
62. Ayoub, *The Quran*, pp. 18-19.
63. Hasan, *Early Development*, pp. 121-2; also al-Salih, *Mabahith*, p. 401.
64. Hasan, *Early Development*.
65. Asad, *Message*, p. 66, n. 5.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.
68. Ayoub, *The Quran*.
69. A *hadith* cited by al-Sibai, *Ishirakiyya*.
70. al-Shafii, *Risala*, pp. 103-8.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. Rahbar, *The Challenge*; al-Salih, *Mabahith*.
74. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p. 35.

75. Gatje, *The Quran and Its Exegesis*; Ahmad (Jullundri), 'Classical Exegesis'; al-Salih, *Mabahith*.
76. A *hadith* narrated by al-Tirmidhi, quoted by al-Ghazali, *Quran Recitation*, p. 86.
77. Ahmad (Jullundri), 'Classical Exegesis', p. 87-88.
78. al-Ghazali, *Quran Recitation*; also Ahmad (Jullundri), 'Classical Exegesis'.
79. For examples of the works of theologians, see Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, also known as *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, and Abd Allah ibn Umar al-Baidawi's *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Tawil*. The best example of speculative Sufi *tafsir* (*tawil*) is that of Muhyi al-Din ibn al-Arabi, *al-Futuha al-Makkiyya* and *Fusus al-Hikam*. The most outstanding work of the Mutazilite theologians is the *tafsir* of al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf an Haqiq Ghawamid al-Tanzil*. Philosophers did not write on Quranic exegesis except in a random way. The closest example is that of Ibn Rushd, *Kitab Fasil al-Maqal*. An example of Shia thinking is the *tafsir* of Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi.
80. Gatje, *The Quran and its Exegesis*.
81. Jensen, *The Interpretation of the Quran in Modern Egypt*.
82. Ibid. For medicine see Rahman, 'Islam and Health', and *Health and Medicine*.
83. al-Ghazali, *Jawahir*, pp. 46-7.
84. J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Quran Interpretation*.
85. Jensen, *Interpretation of Koran*.
86. Baljon, *Modern Muslim*.
87. Jensen, *Interpretation of the Quran*, p. 47.
88. Ibid. On a historical confrontation between science and the church, see White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*.
89. Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), the founder of one of the most influential groups in the current Islamic resurgence, outlines a rather moderate position on the issue of the status of scientific on historical verses of the Quran in which he recognizes the positive contributions of this genre of Quranic *tafsir* and attacks Taha Hussayn who rejected the accuracy of the Quran's historical information. At the same time, al-Banna emphasizes the primary purpose of the Quran, which is that of spiritual-socio-moral guidance.
90. Jensen, *Interpretation of Quran*, p. 54.
91. Ahmad (Jullundri), 'Quranic Exegesis'.
92. Bucaille, *The Bible, The Quran, and Science*.
93. See Asad, *Message*, pp. 676-7, n. 18.
94. al-Shafii, *Risala*. For a critical discussion on the historical development on this concept from a Muslim modernist position, see Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, especially ch. 2 and 3; Hasan, *Early Development*, chap. 5. Modern traditionalist Muslim position on the *Sunna* is best presented by al-Sibai, *Al-Sunna*.
95. See also 2:123; 62:2; 2:231; 4:113; 33:34.
96. Ishaq, *Sirat*.
97. This practice is particularly evident among the followers of *Tabligh-i Jamaat* founded in 1927 in India by Ilyas which has attracted many Malaysians to its fold. For a detailed history of this group, see Haq, *The Faith Movement of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas*.
98. Malaysian Islamic Study Group of U.S. and Canada, *1984 Annual Report*, Publication's Report, n.p. This group was formed in 1976; by 1983 there were fifty six college campuses of M.I.S.G. affiliates in the USA and Canada, consisting of more than 1,000 active members.
99. Darul Arqam Hidupkan *Sunnah Menunggang Kuda*, (Darul Arqam Revives the Sunna of Horse-Riding), *al-Arqam*, August 1984. For a justification of these practices, see Mackeen, 'Some Thoughts on the Meaning of "Following the Sunnah"'.
100. See Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*.
101. Hasan, *Early Development*.
102. Waliy Allah, *Hujja* 2:559-600.
103. Ibid.
104. al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*.
105. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*.
106. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*.
107. al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*.
108. al-Ashqar, *Afal al-Rasul waala al-Ahkam al-Shariyya*.
109. ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima*.
110. Quoted from al-Qardawi, *al-Halal wal Haram fi al-Islam*, p. 213.
111. Ibid., p. 273.
112. al-Ashqar, *Afal*.
113. Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*.
114. See Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*.
115. Al-Ashqar, *Afal*.
116. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*.
117. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of Hadith Literature*.
118. al-Salih, *Mabahith*.
119. Azami, *Studies*.
120. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1953 ed., s.v. 'hadith'.
121. Azami, *Studies*, p. 43.
122. Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature*.
123. See Mahmassani, *Falsafah al-Tashri fi al-Islam*.
124. Azami, *Studies*.
125. Ibid.
126. Siddiqi, *Hadith*.
127. Azami, *Studies*, p. 72.
128. Siddiqi, *Hadith*.
129. Siddiqi, *Hadith*, pp. 202-3.
130. The verse 20:69 deals with Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh's priests and God says: 'Throw that which is in thy right hand. It will eat up that which they have made. Lo! That which they have made is but a wizard's artifice, and a wizard shall not be successful to whatever point of [skill] he may attain.'
131. Ahmad (Jullundri), 'Quranic Exegesis'.
132. See Rahman, *Major Themes*.
133. Siddiqi, *Hadith*, p. 203.
134. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Wali Allah of Delhi*.
135. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 145.

4

The Characteristics of Knowledge in the Quran and the Prophetic Tradition

It is clear that in Islam the attainment of knowledge by man is not only possible, but necessary, and is considered obligatory for all responsible Muslims. This position is contrary to that of the Greek skeptics and Sophists, some of whom considered knowledge to be vain imagination, some of whom reduced knowledge to be merely subjective beliefs of the mind, while others doubted their own doubts.¹ al-Ghazali captures this fundamental Islamic élan when he asserts that man 'was created only to know'.²

In this chapter I shall attempt to examine the salient characteristics, methodologies, and purpose of knowledge in Islam as it emerges from the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and in so doing I hope to show the invalidity of Professor Rosenthal's notion that the numerous explicit statements of the Quran on the origin and character of knowledge is adequate only 'for the unsophisticated reader of the Quran'.³ The elaborate and extensive extra-Quranic speculations of Muslim theologians, thinkers, philosophers, and mystics, should not eclipse the coherent nature and profundity of Quranic statements on knowledge, as this chapter hopes to show.

Knowledge: Its Root and Relationship to God

Since the Quran is neither a philosophical, nor yet an academic treatise on epistemology, it does not present a concise definition of

knowledge.⁴ However, the salient features of a doctrine of knowledge can be discerned quite clearly from its pages.

Knowledge in Arabic is conveyed through the terms *al-ilm*, *al-ma'rifa*, and *al-shu'ur* (awareness), but the first, in the Islamic world-view, is of the highest importance because it is one of the divine attributes. Thus, the epithets that are applied to God are *al-Aalim*, *al-Aliim*, and *al-Allam*, all of which signify the Omniscient, but He is never called *al-Arif* or *al-Sha'ir*.⁵

It has been suggested that the basic meaning of the root *l-m* is derived from *alama*, meaning 'a mark, sign, or token, by which a person or thing is known; a cognizance, or a badge; a characteristic; an indication; a symptom'. Hence, *ma'lam* (plural, *ma'alim*) which means 'sign of the way' or 'that by which one guides oneself or by which oneself is guided'. Similarly, *alam* also signifies 'a way mark for guidance'.⁶ Thus, the connection in the basic etymological meanings between *ilm* (knowledge) and *alam* and *alama*, takes on a special significance for the Arabs for whom the knowledge of the way-signs in the vastness of their desert environment is vitally indispensable for their survival.⁷ Perhaps it is not without significance that the Quranic use of *aya* (plural, *ayat*) (literally means a 'sign') and denotes both verses of Divine revelation and the phenomena of Divine creation. The understanding of these *ayat* is profoundly critical for the success of man's earthly sojourn and eternal happiness in posthumous existence. It is perhaps for this reason that the Prophet Muhammad condemns those who recite the verses 3:190-95 which describe the characteristics of those who have insight, or who recite God's remembrance and contemplate the signs of God in the phenomenal world without thinking about them.⁸

A salient feature in Islamic epistemology is the notion of God's knowledge; it is called by one scholar, al-Kalanbawi (d. 1790/91 CE), 'the mother of Divine attributes'.⁹ In the Quran this notion is so pervasive that it is present in practically every passage of its verses whether in its usage of the direct root of knowledge (*a-l-m*) or through the application of other terms, such as His hearing, His vision, and His constant awareness of everything. His attributes appear to be inseparable. He is described as *Allam al-Ghayub* (Knower of hidden things), *al-Alim al-Khabir* (the Knower, the Aware) (31:34; 49:13), *al-Sami al-Alim* (the Hearing, the Knowing), *al-Sami al-Basir* (the Hearer, Seer). Total and complete or absolute knowledge is God's, which the Quran categorically proclaims about thirty times. The all-comprehensiveness of His knowledge covers whatever is in the

heavens and the earth and their secrets. His knowledge, as evinced by the Quran, includes such particularities as a fruit falling from its calyx or the conception or delivery of a baby. He knows the *ghayb* (Unseen) and the *zahir* (evident) and the secret (*batin*).

But perhaps the most important point for man's individual ethical development and social evolution is the idea of God's intimate knowledge and presence. He knows everything that man does including the secrets of the hearts. No secret counsels and thoughts are hidden from Him. He constitutes what Professor Fazlur Rahman calls 'a third dimension' in human relations.¹⁰ This is poignantly expressed in verse 58:7:

Do you not see that God knows everything in the heavens and the earth? There is no secret cliquing of three but that He is their fourth, nor of five but that He is their sixth, nor of less than these or more but that He is with them wherever they be.

The source of all human knowledge is God for He taught man everything that the latter knows (96:5). The angels also acknowledge that they have no knowledge except that which was imparted by Him (2:32). Man's knowledge, by virtue of the fact that it is acquired by finite tools, whether by the use of intellect, sense-perception, or intuition, is relatively limited, especially regarding the realm of the Unseen, as in the nature of the *ruh* or soul.¹¹

Knowledge and Truth

The second salient feature of Quranic epistemology is its insistence on the truth (*al-haqq*) and certainty (*al-yaqin*), whose antitheses are falsehood (*al-batil*), doubt (*shakk*) and conjecture (*al-zann*). These concepts came to the fore when the Meccans refused to accept the doctrinal positions brought by the Messenger of God, that is, the contrast between knowledge given directly by God and knowledge of man. Hence, concerning the Christian belief about the crucifixion of Jesus, the Quran asserts:

And those who differ therein [that Jesus was crucified] are full of doubts [*shakk*] with no [certain] knowledge but follow only conjecture [*zann*], for certainly they killed him not. But most of them [i.e., the Christians] follow nothing but conjecture; truly conjecture cannot avail against Truth [*al-haqq*]. (10:36)

A similar use of *zann* and *haqq* appears in 53:28, where the Meccans labelled the message of Muhammad as fairy tales (*asatir*): 'But they [Meccans] have no knowledge therein, they follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against truth' (53:28). The ultimate, indubitable truth is from God which is absolute certainty (*haqq al-yaqin*) (69:51). Certainty appears to be of three grades: cognitive certainty (*ilm al-yaqin*), certainty of sight (*ain al-yaqin*), and absolute experienced certainty (*haqq al-yaqin*) which in one *sura*, concerns the experienced knowledge of Judgment and Hellfire (102:5-8). The Quranic usage of the term truth (*al-haqq*) epistemologically refers to God Himself, and the different aspects of divine knowledge that He vouchsafes to the prophets.¹² Therefore in this sense, the only true knowledge that is absolutely certain must be in direct accord with revelation. All others that are contrary to it are false (*batil*), or mere conjecture (*zann*), or based on whims (*hawa*), haughtiness (*istikbar*), or ignorance (*jahl*).

However, it must be noted that *zann* is not a totally negative epistemological concept in Islam, and that despite the overwhelming emphasis of the Quran on the truth and certainty of knowledge, man does and can know the extra-Quranic data. In 30:7, the Quran states that the Meccans unbelievers 'know (*yalamuna*) the externalities of life of this world'. In 17:26-36 the Quran gives a warning that implies that certain faculties in man are equipped to deal with knowledge: '[O Man], follow not of which thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing, and the sight, and the heart—each of these will be questioned.'

It has been mentioned that *zann* (conjecture), is the antonym of *ilm*, *haqq*, and *yaqin*, specifically in the context of Divine knowledge. But in two places 2:41-46 and 2:249, the *zann* of those who believe, by virtue of being guided by revelational knowledge, acquires the meaning of *yaqin* (certain knowledge):

O children of Israel! . . . Believe in that which I have bestowed from on high. . . . And seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer: this is indeed a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit [*khasha'in*] who are certain [*yazunnu*] that they shall meet their lord and then unto Him they shall return. (2:41-46, 249)¹³

My contention that *zann* does have a positive epistemological value in the context of human knowledge or human interpretation of Divine knowledge will be more evident in the case of *ijtihad*, a process of intellectual exertion carried out by qualified individuals. The results

of any *ijtihād* are 'always *zann*'.¹⁴ According to the famous *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad assured a reward for a wrong *ijtihād*, two, if correct.¹⁵

On the other hand, Muslims hold that consensus—whether of the people of Medina according to the Malikis, or of the scholars, or of all Muslims—based both on a tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that Muslims shall never agree on an error and on the Quran (4:115 and 2:143), is infallible.¹⁶

It can be surmised that the Quranic concept of *shura* (mutual consultation) which includes *ijtihād*, and even *ijma* is an excellent example of how *zann* at the level of human knowledge can be relatively certain and for all practical purposes, necessary. Hence, in 3:159, the Prophet Muhammad was ordered to consult his people despite their previous mistakes at Uhud; while in 42:38, *shura* is stipulated as one of the necessary traits of the believers. The apparent ambiguity of the *yagin-zann* relationship at the level of human knowledge, even that which is based on Divine sources, should be treated and appreciated as a positive tension. On the one hand, that is, the certainty side of the pole, it is important to emphasize the feasibility of decision-making and avoiding constant doubt. On the other hand, the conjecture side of the tension must always be kept in mind so as to prevent fanaticism and arrogance whether theological, scientific, or historical, and to encourage further investigation in the spirit of *ijtihād* and *shura*. This attitude will encourage co-operation and will enhance the development of the sciences, humanities and civilization, not only among Muslims, but for all mankind.¹⁷

The Integral Nature of Knowledge

The third fundamental feature of the concept of knowledge in Islam and specifically in the Quran is its holistic or integral nature. This distinctiveness is evident in its world-view which is uncompromisingly *tawhīdīc* or monotheistic. In this context, it means that the epistemological concerns are related, in fact, to ethics and spirituality. The scope of its epistemological concerns extends to both the religious sphere as well as the secular, because the Islamic *weltanschauung* does not admit the water-tight compartmentalization between these concerns in actual life. Such a compartmentalization would imply the denial of Divine wisdom, guidance, and concern in that particular domain. The existence of the one God who is the Source of all knowledge directly entails the unity and integrality of all epistemological

sources and ends. This becomes apparent when we ponder the Quranic usage of the terms *aya* and *kalima* to denote both the verses of the Quran and the myriads of existences in the universe as documented in the second chapter. The concept of the integrality of knowledge has been dealt with by al-Ghazali in his *Kitāb Jawāhir al-Quran* where he affirms that the Quranic verses dealing with the stars, or health, for example, can be fully understood only with proper knowledge of astronomy or medicine respectively.

In his defence of the philosophical science, the Cordovan jurist-philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE) also pointed to the complementarity (although not the integrality) of the religious and philosophical interpretations by quoting several verses from the Quran that urge men to observe and describe the study of the creations of the heavens and the earth.¹⁸ Similarly, the Quran also urges man to travel the earth to learn from the fates of previous civilizations; this constitutes an integral study of history, archaeology, comparative religion, sociology and so on.

In 41:53, the Quran states categorically that the signs of God in the universe and in the depths of the human psyche are part and parcel of the total argument concerning the validity of revelational knowledge affirming their mutual compatibility and integrality:

In time we shall make them fully understand Our signs in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves so that it will surely become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth.

The relationship between disciplines of knowledge and their integrality and compatibility with the Islamic *weltanschauung* is also evident from the fact that many prophets of God were taught other forms of knowledge apart from Divine revelation. Thus, Joseph (Yusuf) knew the interpretation of dreams (12:6; 101), David (Dawud) knew how to produce coats of mail (20:80), and Solomon (Sulayman) knew the languages of the animals and the *jinn* (27:16-20).

However, the integrality or unity of the branches of knowledge does not mean they are equal or that there is no priority among them. To make an analogy, the human limbs and organs form integral parts of the human body. But closely interconnected as they are in their functions for a person's well-being, they are not of the same status in value and importance. Certainly, the brain and the heart are the most important, whereas the hair, while it may improve appearance, is

certainly dispensable. In the same manner, revelational knowledge is the most important since it comes directly from God, is unique in certitude and has a fundamentally beneficial nature. Hence, the prophets rank the highest in the Islamic scale of humanity. All true knowledge or science should help us to understand and realize the meaning and spirit of Divine knowledge in its widest sense for personal and societal development. Hence Muslim scholars throughout the centuries have produced countless works on the categorization of the sciences where they seek to arrange various disciplines of knowledge according to their scheme of priorities, quite often reflecting their intellectual bias even to the extent of forbidding certain sciences that other scholars consider fundamentally important.¹⁹ I shall return to this theme in the next chapter.

Knowledge and Action

The next salient feature that I wish to examine is the relationship between knowledge and action. It is logical that knowledge should be followed by good deeds. This is not only because true fear of God (*khashya* or *taqwa*) is defined in terms of good actions, both private and public, personal and societal, but also because action falls within the scope of the term *alim* itself. *Alim* is a noun which not only means 'one who possesses the attribute of knowledge' but in its grammatical form means 'one who does according to his knowledge'.²⁰

This point, namely, that the dimension of practice is part of the concept of knowledge, is one of the most distinctive differences, for example, between the Islamic conception of knowledge and that of the Chinese who are concerned far more with action than with knowledge, or with the Indians who are preoccupied with abstract thinking, pushing action into the background.²¹

Knowledge and Spirituality

Knowledge in the Quran does not deal only with intellectual and cognitive matters, but integrates spiritual and practical aspects of human concerns. It is for this reason that the Quran often includes belief (*iman*), light (*nur*), and guidance (*huda*) in its semantic field of knowledge.

Light has always been a favourite metaphor of spiritual terminology and is used to connote knowledge, in contrast with the darkness of ignorance (*zulumat*). In Rosenthal's words: "The symbol of light was

common in Biblical thought, and throughout later Judaism and Christianity. Light shows the way and provides guidance, as do wisdom and the religious law."²²

The Quran also uses the word light in verse 24:35, which metaphorically refers to God being the Light of the heavens and the earth. Mohammad Asad suggests that it 'alludes to the illumination which He [God], who is the Ultimate Truth, bestows upon the minds and the feelings of all who are willing to be guided.'²³ Asad's suggestion seems to correspond to the interpretation of Abd Allah ibn Abbas and Abd Allah ibn Masud in that it is 'a parable of his light in the heart of a believer'.²⁴ Hence, in the last part of the verses above, the Quran declares: 'God guides unto His light whom He wills [to be guided]'. On the other hand, the situation for those who are bent on denying the truth is:

like the depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, made yet more dark by wave billowing over wave, with [black] clouds above it all: depths of darkness, layer upon layer, [so that] when one holds up his hand, he can hardly see it; for he to whom God gives no light, no light whatsoever has he! (24:40)

This graphic representation of the darkness of *kufr* (disbelief) is supported by verse 2:257 when God brings those who believe out of darkness and into the light, while the evil elements plunge those who disbelieve from light into darkness. In verse 30:20, the terms knowledge (*ilm*), guidance (*huda*), and light-giving book, that is, revealed scripture (*kitab munir*), are joined together, while there is simultaneous criticism of those who follow the belief and actions of their erring ancestors. In verse 2:26, the relationship between faith, knowledge, truth, on the one hand and the denial of truth and going astray on the other, is manifestly clear:

Behold God does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something [even] less than that. Now as for those who have attained to faith, they know [*ya lamun*] that it is the truth from their Lord—whereas those who are bent on denying the truth say 'What could God mean by this parable?' In this way does He cause many to go astray, just as He guides many aright.

In verse 2:2-5, the Quran asserts the indubitable nature of the Book to be a guide for God-conscious people who believe in the Unseen, perform prayers and spend from their property. They also believe in the

unity of revelation (by affirming the message of Islam and that of earlier prophets). And they have certain knowledge and conviction of the other world. These few verses effectively show the integral relationship between numerous concepts in the Islamic world-view: the Quran as the source of guidance, unity of prophecy, God-consciousness, mandatory performance, generosity, belief, and certain knowledge.

Perhaps it is due to the central importance of knowledge in the true spiritual development of an Islamic personality, that the Quran (35:28) had already emphasized the priority of knowledge: as early as the fourth or fifth year in the Muslim Mission in Mecca: 'Of all His servants only such as are endowed with knowledge stand [truly] in awe of God *khayyat l Lah*.' From the characteristics described by early authorities as cited by Ibn Kathir, such as Ibn Masud, Ibn Abbas and Hasan al-Basri *khayya* resembles the traits of *taqwa*. In fact, Izutsu equates the two terms.²⁵

The relationship between knowledge and belief or faith is demonstrated in 58:11—a middle Medinan verse that deals with the Muslims' social etiquette in assemblies. Dignity and status are shown to be dependent on faith and knowledge:

O you who have attained to faith! When you are told, 'Make room for one another in the assemblies', do make room; [and in return] God will make room for you [in His Grace]. And whenever you are told, 'Rise up,' do rise up; God shall exalt by many degrees those of you who have attained to faith and, such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge.

It should be noted that honour and dignity accorded to true believers and *ulama* in this verse are in perfect accord with the later Medinan verse 49:13 which states that 'the noblest among you is the most God conscious [*atqakum*]' for *taqwa* is a consequence of belief and knowledge.

It seems that the relationship between belief and knowledge in the Quran is considerably different from that in philosophy, where belief is taken to be a judgement or accepted proposition but which is not based on demonstrable evidence and, as such, is inferior to knowledge.²⁶

It seems that there exists a two-way causal relationship between knowledge and belief or faith in the Quran. But there are several places where the Quran appears to hold that faith precedes and causes

knowledge. On the other hand, according to the observation of Ibn Taimiyya, the Quran uses the term belief only in matters that cannot be demonstrated, such as belief in God, the prophecy, life-after-death, and other aspects within the domain of the Unseen.²⁷

The Quran, in verse 2:177, while defining righteousness, lists the objects of belief: God, the Last Day, the angels, the scriptures, and the prophets; while a famous *hadith* reported in the *Sahih* of Muslim adds the belief in the predestination of good and evil to what is commonly called *arkan al-iman*, pillars of belief.²⁸

Of two middle Meccan verses, one (42:18) declares that those who have faith know the Day of Judgment to be the truth, while the other (34:21) states that those who have faith are contrasted with those who doubt. In an early Medinan chapter the believers are equated with those who have certain knowledge about the Day of Judgment (2:2-5), while in 2:26, it is said that the believers know that the parables regarding paradise and hell are truths from their Lord. It is obvious that in all these examples, knowledge or certainty as a consequence of belief is the same as that which is believed to be based on prophetic or revelational authority.²⁹

The knowledge-belief causal relationship is especially strong when we consider other synonyms of *ilm*. Hence, those who are endowed with knowledge (*alladhina utul-ilm*) believe in the Divine revelation and their hearts humbly submit to Him (22:52). Those people of the Book that are deeply grounded in knowledge (*rasikhuna fil-ilm*) believed with the Muslims in the message brought by the Prophet Muhammad.

The phrase 'those who possess understanding' (*ulu l-albab*) occurs sixteen times in the Quran, starting from the Middle Meccan period until the Medinan years. Perhaps the best definition of *ulu l-albab*, which indicates that intellectual insight is integrated with faith and many other key concepts of the Quran, can be seen in the following verses:

Can, then, he who knows that whatever has been bestowed from on high upon thee [Muhammad] is the truth be deemed equal to those who are blind? Only those who have understanding [*ulu l-albab*] keep this in mind: they who are true to their covenant and who keep together what God has bidden to be joined, and stand in awe of their Lord and fear the most evil reckoning [which awaits such as do not respond to Him]; and who are patient in adversity out of a longing for their Lord's countenance, and are constant in prayer,

and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what we provide for them as sustenance and [who] repel evil with good. (13:19-22)

There are indeed signs (*ayat*) for all those who have understanding, who remember God when they stand and sit, and when they lie down to sleep and reflect in the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say):

O our Lord! Thou has not created this without meaning or purpose. . . . Keep us safe from suffering through fire. . . . O our Lord! We heard a caller calling [us] to faith, Believe in your Lord! And so we came to believe. . . . Forgive us our sins, and efface our bad deeds, and let us die the death of the truly virtuous. (3:190-93)

The Quran seems to place the *ulu l-albab* on the same level as those who are believers; this is apparent not only through the implications of the verses above but also by the fact that the expectations placed upon them are akin to those that are placed upon the believers. They are asked to believe in the Prophet's message, to affirm the unity of God, and to be ever-conscious of Him. They will be granted guidance and remembrance. They will be able to derive moral lessons from the Quranic stories, and an understanding of the true import and implication of God's parables. Also the truth about the creation of the heavens and the earth will be discernible by them.

Islam assigns such a lofty position to belief that is grounded in true knowledge based on the authoritative guidance of the prophets because without that knowledge man would find a justification for believing in anything, ranging from simple superstitions to elaborate systems of misguided theologies. The prophets are sent to purify genuine religious needs and to provide socio-moral guidance; thus, understandably, the Quran severely condemns those people who imitate their misguided forefathers despite the clear evidence brought by the prophets. They are likened to 'beasts which hear the shepherd's cry, but hear in it nothing, but the [physical] sound of the voice and the call. Deaf are they, and dumb, and blind; for they do not use their reason' (2:170-71).

Even though the Quran positively emphasizes the relationship between knowledge and faith, it also considers the fact that, quite often, the intended result does not materialize either, due to worldly considerations following vain desires, envy, false pride, and arrogance. Hence, in verse 7:174-76, we are informed about a man who

was given the details of God's message, but he discarded them because 'he always gravitated to the earth and followed his own desires'. The people of Ad and Thamud, rejected the messages of the prophets out of pride (41:15), and Satan made their evil actions look good in their own eyes even though they were vouchsafed the ability to perceive the truth (29:38).

The majority of the people of the Book have been frequently criticized by the Quran for denying the truth of the Islamic message, either out of envy or by concealing it with falsehood:

O people of the Book [Jews and Christians], why do you deny the truth of God's message to which you yourselves bear witness? . . . Why do you cloak the truth with falsehood and conceal the truth which you know? (3:70-71)³⁰

The people of the Book are reprehended for knowingly distorting the true teachings of the Book in speech, forgery and for selling it cheaply.

Knowledge and Ethics

The last major aspect of the integrated concept of knowledge in the Quran that needs to be examined is its relationship to action. In the light of the foregoing discussions of its relationship to guidance, piety, and faith, the emphasis on the responsibility of the scholars to act should come as no surprise. The ethical dimension lies within the very structure of the form *alim*. *Alim* (plural, *ulama*) is not only a participle indicating 'a temporary, transitory, or accidental action or state of being', but also serves as an adjective or a substantive, expressing a continuous action, a habitual state of being, or a permanent quality. Hence, an *alim* can be said to signify someone who acts, either continuously or temporarily, according to knowledge.³¹

However, as far as the Quran is concerned the link between knowledge and good action (*amal* or *amal salih*) does not appear as frequently as that of *iman* and *amal salih* which occur so often that the two are like conceptual siamese twins. Since there exists a causal relationship between knowledge, including all its synonymms, and true belief (which includes *taqwa* and other terms in its semantic field), it can be syllogistically deduced that knowledge would (through belief) also be a positive cause of *amal salih*. Knowledge should produce true belief (*iman*), while *iman* in turn should produce good deeds (*amal salih*), and therefore knowledge should produce *amal salih*. *Amal salih* is briefly

defined as all those actions that emerge out of and in conformity to, the Islamic world-view. They include the ritual obligations and other religious duties as well as efforts of personal or social significance along moral, spiritual, intellectual, or socio-economic lines.

The absence of a single direct causal link between knowledge and action in the Quran (although it is amply demonstrated in the *hadith* collections) is intentional. There are two possible explanations for this omission. Either it is because this relationship is too obvious to be mentioned, since for an act to be considered good the actor must not only have a pure intention but also he or she should know the true nature of his or her action for an insincerely-motivated act, even though it may produce the desired results, is still deficient from the Islamic perspective. Or, it is because not all knowledge should lead to action. For knowledge itself is a product of an act; hence the desirability of having a group of believers refraining from *jihad* in order to seek knowledge to educate the public. Because the acquisition of knowledge itself requires tremendous effort and sacrifice, it is elevated to the same status as *jihad*. However, within the eschatological frame of reference there exist numerous examples of direct links between action and knowledge. Everything that is done in this world, good or bad, is surely known by God and the results will certainly be made known to the actor in the Hereafter: 'He who does an atom's weight of good shall see it and vice-versa' (99:7-8). 'We [Allah] will inform the believers of all the deeds they did' (41:50).

With this clear linkage between action and certain knowledge, it is quite tempting to speculate that this principle could be applied to the present world. But it must be reiterated that the above relationship is a specific reference to the concept of accountability in the Hereafter. If we relate it to the present world, it would mean that one can know better by doing or through consciously acting. Such knowledge would be helpful in evaluating previous knowledge and action for the subsequent improvement in both realms. The only major difference between the two is that, in the Hereafter, the knowledge gained would be final, while here it is only a process of continuous *ijtihad* and *jihad*.

Knowledge and Wisdom

It might be appropriate at this stage to discuss the concept of *hikma* (wisdom) and its relationship to knowledge in the Quran. *Hikma* properly or primarily signifies what prevents or restrains thoughtless behaviour. It is derived from *hakama* signifying 'a certain

appertenance of a beast because it prevents its possessor from having bad dispositions'. (Definition of words from Lane's *Lexicon*.) *Hikma*, which is similar to *hukma*, means 'knowledge of the truth of things, and action according to the requirements thereof', hence, wisdom. In its primary meaning it comes close to that of *aql*, which signifies the 'act of withholding or restraining', which in its substantive form means something that 'with-holds or restrains its possessor from doing that which is not suitable', thus signifying intelligence, intellect, understanding, mind, reason, or knowledge.

In the Quran, God is called *Ahkam al-Hakimin*, which means 'the wisest of those who possess the attribute of wisdom'. (Several other constructions are also employed as part of His Name.)³² Wisdom is God's bounty to the believers. Generally speaking, the Quran associates wisdom with the revelation, whether in scriptural form or not. Thus the Quran (and all revealed scriptures) is described as the Book of Wisdom (*al-Kitab al-Hakim*) and the message of wisdom (*al-Dhikr al-Hakim*).

All prophets were taught wisdom whether they received the scripture or not. Hence, the 'children' of Ibrahim such as Ishaq, Yaqub, Dawud, Sulayman, Ayyub (Job), Yusuf, Musa, Harun, Zakariyya, Isa (Jesus), Ilyas (Elijah), Ismail, Ilyasa (Elisha), and Yunus, were all granted the Book, sound judgement (*hukm*) (in other places, the term *hikma* is generally used), and prophethood (*nubuwwa*). The Prophet Muhammad too was granted the same. In several cases, the term *al-Kitab* is substituted with the term for knowledge (*al-ilm*) as in the case of Dawud and Sulayman, Yusuf, Lut, and Musa. The Prophet Luqman, on the other hand, was the only one among the named ones that did not receive a book but was given wisdom.

It is thus safe to infer from the linguistic meanings of *hikma* and its usage in the Quran in the above examples that it is an instrument for the prevention of wrong acts and production of correct action, of true knowledge. In the context of prophecy, al-Shafii seems to be correct to equate with the *sunna* of the prophets. The *Sunna* of the Prophet as defined by scholars, includes all his conduct, his sayings, his approval, verbal or silent, and disapproval, in transmitting and translating the Divine messages.³³

The Unlimited Nature of Knowledge

The fourth salient feature of the concept of knowledge in the Quran is its unlimited nature. Knowledge here is not restricted to human knowledge only, but includes divine knowledge as well. The infinitude of

knowledge is clearly expressed in 12:76 which says that above every knower there is one who knows more.³⁴ For that reason, even prophets need to seek more knowledge. Thus, the Quran gives a detailed account of Musa's seeking knowledge from a 'servant of God',³⁵ from whom he learned much wisdom (18:60-82). The Prophet Muhammad was commanded to pray for a continuous development of his knowledge: 'Say: My Lord! Increase for me in knowledge' (20:11).

The infinitude of the totality of knowledge, out of which man is given a little, should make man feel and act less arrogantly in his denying or dismissing things that he cannot perceive by his limited senses and intellect. Rather, he should truly employ his senses and intellect in absorbing the knowledge received from God for a more integrated wholesome existence. This aspect of Quranic epistemology seems to imply also, that the knowledge of a particular individual (except that of the prophets in terms of revelation), or a particular generation of scholars, does not carry absolute truth-value. Rather their presentations and findings should be continuously evaluated on the basis of continuing emerging evidence and information.

The Opposites of Knowledge

No account of the theory or concept of knowledge would be complete without admitting the existence of the concept of the opposite of knowledge. Many philosophers, as Bertrand Russell acutely observes, '... have constructed theories according to which all our thinking ought to have been true, and then had the greatest difficulty in finding a place for falsehood'.³⁶

The concept of knowledge in the Quran, as seen above, is quite comprehensive. It includes in its broad meaning and signification the existence and retention of proper information or facts whether they pertain to natural, historical, physical, or divine elements. The semantic field of knowledge (and its synonymous concepts) also incorporates the process and product of contemplation (*tafakkur*, *tadabbur*), understanding (*fiqh*), spiritual guidance (*huda*), and 'light' (*nur*), religious truth (*al-haqq*), certainty (*yaqin*), faith (*iman*), and ethical relations (*taqwa*, *amalf*). So the antithesis of knowledge would primarily mean the negation of *ilm* and its synonyms and also, the opposites of all the above elements in its epistemological field. Hence the antithesis of knowledge is expressed by the application of negative articles such as *la ya lamun* (they do not know), or *highayri ilm* (without knowledge).

It is also conveyed through *shubha* (similarity, ambiguity, skepticism), *shakk* (doubt), *rayb* (doubt, suspicion), *zann* (conjecture), *hawān* (uninformed desire), *batil* (falsehood), *zulma* (darkness), and *jahl* (ignorance, 'barbarism').³⁷

Only God knows all things. This theme is repeated often, for all creation, no matter how elevated, still cannot know everything. Basically, this ignorance is related to, and contrasted with God's Omniscience, Omnipotence, His commands or judgments. We are informed that the angels could not fathom the wisdom of man's vice-regency on earth because of his tendency for corruption and bloodshed. Neither could they know the creative knowledge that was taught to Adam. The prophets do not know the Unseen unless God wills it. Neither do they know how their effort at spreading God's message will finally turn out.

The Jews and Christians, without knowledge, claimed Ibrahim to be a partisan of their religious parochialism. Their notion regarding the alleged death of Jesus on the cross is based not on knowledge but on uncertainty and conjecture. All forms of anti-*tauhidic* notions whether in associating others with God (*shirk*) or disputing about Him, for example, are considered not to be based on knowledge but only on *zann* and lies.

Man, in his natural development begins with no knowledge during infancy, grows to know something, then reverts to the infantile state in knowing nothing, that is, in forgetting everything. Even in his period of knowing, man's knowledge, even regarding the natural world at a particular time, is limited:

And He has created horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and He has created [other] things of which you have no knowledge. (16:8)

Glory to God, who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own [human] kind, and [other] things of which they have no knowledge. (36:36)

This may seem to be a contradiction of the concept of the infinitude of knowledge elaborated earlier. However this is actually not so. In fact, the two doctrines form two sides of the same coin: a particular scholar at a particular time cannot know everything. Ultimately, he has got to submit his knowledge to the scrutiny of other scholars in his and in other generations as well; and to quote Ali Uthman al-Hujwiri

(d. 1076 CE), 'You must know enough to know that you don't know'.³⁸

The concept of *jahl* is considered by Muslim scholars as the direct opposite of knowledge. al-Fayyumi (d. 1368 CE), author of the lexicon, *al-Misbah al-Munir fi Gharib al-Sharh al-Kabir* (The Radiant Lamp Concerning the Obscure Words of The Great Commentary) defines *jahl* or *jahila* as the opposite of knowledge (*khilaf il-ilm*) in accordance with earlier lexicologists and grammarians such as al-Firuzabadi, al-Raghib al-Isfahani, al-Jawhari and the Sufi, al-Hujwiri.³⁹ In their definition, *jahl* is not merely an intellectual void of knowledge; rather it is inclusive of the behavioural traits of silliness, foolishness, and wrong conduct. al-Raghib, for example, holds that its primary meaning is the 'mind's voidness of knowledge', and then 'the believing of a thing different from what it is', as well as 'the doing of a thing in a manner different from that which it ought to be done'.⁴⁰

It is important to note these expositions because modern Western scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher and Toshihiko Izutsu, through the semantic analysis of the root *j-h-l* in the Quran, come to the conclusion that *jahl* is not 'ignorance' which is primarily the direct opposite of knowledge, but rather of *hilm* denoting the 'moral reasonableness of a civilised man' which includes such traits as forbearance, patience, clemency, and freedom from blind passion. On the other hand, Rosenthal, applying his characteristic method of etymological comparison, arrives at the same conclusion given by classical Muslim scholars, although with a different rationale. He suggests that *jahiliyya* means ignorant persons who spoke and acted against the norms and values espoused by Muhammad, who adopted the Jewish concept of 'exile' (*galut*, *galuta*).⁴¹ This latter part of Rosenthal's speculation cannot be historically substantiated; that is, how and where the Prophet acquired the Jewish term. Also, the Arabian term *jahl* and its derivatives are found in pre-Islamic poetry—for example, the Muallaqa of Amr ibn Kalthum.

The abstract noun *jahiliyya* itself occurs four times in the Quran.⁴² *Prima facie* these verses seem to have no relation to 'ignorance' as an antithesis of knowledge in the narrow sense. In fact, in one place (27:54) where the Quran condemns the people of the Prophet Lut for their homosexuality, they are called 'ignorant' (*tajhalun*) despite 'seeing' the evil of their actions (*tubsiirun*).

However, since the notion of knowledge as expounded in this chapter is a comprehensive one encompassing the cognitive, spiritual-affective, and ethical dimensions, it is perfectly plausible to suggest

that the concept that opposes knowledge also acquires a tri-dimensional signification. The definition of *jahl* given by al-Raghib al-Isfahani cited earlier indicates that it denotes an absence of knowledge and/or an error in belief and/or an error in action. These dimensions in various combinations appear in the semantic fields of the term *jahiliyya*. Contrary to Izutsu's and Goldziher's findings, there are quite clearly some epistemological concepts in the semantic field which support the assertion that *jahl* is an opposite of knowledge as the classical Muslim scholars held. In verse 3:154 two terms that oppose knowledge, generally speaking, *zann* (conjecture) and *ghayr l-haqq* (untruth) are linked to *jahiliyya* which suggests a similarity in meaning. Again, a characteristic of knowledge, namely certainty (*yaqin*), is contrasted with *jahiliyya* in 5:50, which in this context, may possibly denote a profound doubt, and consequently, a tendency to ignore and disregard God's judgments and laws. In 33:33-34 two other elements of knowledge, *ayat* (verses of the Quran) and *hikma* (wisdom) are contrasted with our term of concern. In this context, the phrase 'the earlier *jahiliyya*' may be interpreted as the time or the state before the knowledge of divine guidance came regarding the etiquette of socialization, or of wearing ornaments. Finally, in 48:26-28, *jahiliyya* is linked first with *kufr* (disbelief) and *hamiyya* (fierceness or stubbornness), and later, is contrasted with epistemologically relevant concepts of *taqwa*, *huda*, and *haqq*.

It should be noted that the emphasis of Goldziher and Izutsu on the spiritual-affective and ethical dimensions of *jahl* in opposition to *hilm* seems to be justified on the basis of the Quran.⁴³ But these scholars are not justified in excluding the equally important negative epistemological relevance of *jahl*. In fact, Rosenthal questions their position as being one of 'doubtful validity'. The concept of knowledge in the Quran does, in fact, have its opposite—*jahl*, as indicated by all classical Muslim scholars.

The other epistemological negatives in the Quran are the notion of doubt (*shakk*, *shubha*, and *rayb*), conjecture or opinion (*zann*), falsehood (*batil*), lie (*kadhib*), error (*dalala*), forgetfulness (*nisyan*), heedlessness (*ghafala*) and desire (*hawa*). Certain metaphors like the sensory-perceptual dysfunction (deaf, dumb, and blind) and darkness and death are commonly used to signify the pathetic state of ignorance in the widest sense as expounded earlier.⁴⁴

It should be reiterated that these epistemological negatives, just like their opposites, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in their total meanings.

It seems that as a simple concept, doubt has become the 'true pariah and outcast of Muslim civilization',⁴⁵ and can be credibly substantiated from the Quran. Of the three terms for doubt, the more technically accepted one is *shakk*, the exact etymological meaning of which is hard to discern. However, several classical grammarians such as al-Jawhari, al-Saghani, and Murtada al-Zabidi have suggested that it signifies 'a cleaving or sticking of one thing to another' from which, epistemologically, it could be extrapolated that doubt involves two or more propositions which appear to be inseparable from each other due to their apparent similarity (*shubha*).⁴⁶ Doubt also exists between contradictory propositions that are indistinguishable in the minds of the subject either through lack of information, or spiritual aberrations due to pride and/or whims, or possibly through entrenched traditions. A separation of the 'sticking or cleaving', whether between apparently similar propositions or mutually contradictory ones, could be achieved by knowledge conveyed by authoritative informants which, in Islamic nomenclature, respectively means the Quran (which is called *al-Furqan*, the Criterion) and the Prophet Muhammad. The meaning of *shakk* as speculated above is brought clearly in 4:157 where the Quran rejects the claims of some Jews of having slain Jesus on the cross as mere conjecture, and not based on true knowledge. In 10:94, doubt is again contrasted with truth, which is one of the definitive traits of the Quranic concept of knowledge. Here the Meccan unbelievers are challenged to discard their doubts about the truth of Muhammad's message by asking those who had been reading earlier scriptures. In light of this, *shakk* is correctly considered by Muslims to be an adequate manifestation of *jahl*: *kafa bil-shakk jahlan*.⁴⁷

The notion of doubt is also generally conveyed by the word *rayb*. al-Edrus however, insists that *rayb* is categorically different from *shakk* and *shubha*, both of which require the existence of postulated similarity/ambiguity and/or mutually contradictory propositions which also indicate some degree of knowledge. In all Quranic references to *rayb*, he contends there is news (*naba*) of the Judgment Day and revelation which have no frame of reference except from Divine sources which can be rejected as sheer fantasy. Thus, *rayb*, to him, refers to 'the rejection of a level of reality which is outside ordinary experience'.⁴⁸ al-Edrus's thesis is not accurate for the Quran since it uses the terms *shakk* and *rayb* in such a manner that they indicate their equivalent meaning. For example, in 34:54—*shakk murib: innahum kanu fi shakk murib* (verily they were lost in doubt amounting to suspicion)—*murib* is the active participle of the fourth form *araba* 'to fill

oneself with suspicion'. Also *irtab* is used in 2:282 with reference to doubt about evidence. The meaning in these and other verses where they are closely linked, do not indicate a radical difference as al-Edrus seems to suggest.⁴⁹ His arguments and conclusions are the result of a purely semantic analysis disregarding the totality of Quranic teaching. Firstly, *rayb* refers to the uncertainty, doubt or suspicion on the entirety of Muhammad's message which is embodied in *al-Kitab*, as clearly shown in 2:2, 10:37, and 32:2. The news about the Hour and the Day of Judgment, even though occurring four times, is only a part of the total message of the Book. His mistake lies in the rigid distinction between the message of the Book and the news of the Day of Judgment as mutually exclusive, while the latter is actually a part of the former. Secondly, the Meccan polytheists did have some knowledge of some of Muhammad's message (even though they did not believe), especially concerning the news of the Judgment through their contacts with the *ahl al-Kitab*.⁵⁰

The notion of doubt and skeptical questioning is also conveyed by the root *m-r-y*. The objects of doubt in this case seem to be quite similar to those of *shakk* and *rayb*, that is, revelational experiences of the Prophet, or the meeting with God on Judgment Day (32:23; 41:54).

It seems that doubt is only negative and condemned when it is entertained in spite of the clear evidence of the Quran (whose verses are called *bayyinat*) which are clear, manifest, and indubitable intellectual or perceptual proofs or arguments.⁵¹ In addition, the Quran and its arguments are called *burhan* (4:147), meaning a demonstrative proof containing rational and psychologically compelling factors. The Quran also calls its argument *sultan* (53:33) which is perhaps the strongest kind of 'sign'. It means 'clear proof or argument rooted in sure knowledge': the truth that attacks the mind with force and authority.⁵² It is thus the doubting of such overwhelming evidence, which has been clarified, explained and detailed, that is condemned and equated with whims, disbelief, and arrogance. However, doubt that exists within the process of sincerely seeking the truth seems to be acceptable to the Quran. Hence the Prophet Ibrahim, doubting and making numerous errors in search of the true God, is accounted in a positive light (6:75-79). In verse 2:260, it is described how Ibrahim requested his Lord to show him how He gives life to the dead to set his heart at rest, indicating a certain degree of doubt—this did not evoke a negative response from God.⁵³

Another epistemological negative in the Quran is conjecture (*zann*), which has already been dealt with in this chapter. It might be added

that conjecture is also conveyed by *khars*. In its semantic field the characteristic inclusion of many spiritual and epistemological negatives is evident, as in 6:148–50. Here, those who committed *shirk* tend to resort to a predestinarian excuse by blaming God for their sins and those of their fathers; the Quran regards this as lying about the truth of the matter. The Prophet is then urged to challenge those people to provide certain knowledge regarding their conjectures. Surely the final evidence of all truth belongs to God.

In an earlier passage in the same *sura*, the Quran advises the Prophet not to be doubtful of God's promises and not to pay heed to the majority of those who live on earth for they will lead him astray through conjecture and guessing. Certainly God knows those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided (6:114–15). And again in 10:66–70, those who committed *shirk* were merely conjecturing in assigning to Him a son without evidence and knowledge, all of which are lies, the result of their persistent denial of the truth.

Batil is the antithesis of the truth of the totality of the Islamic message as shown in verse 17:81 ('And say: The truth has now come [to light] and falsehood [*batil*] has vanished away . . .') which the Prophet recited while destroying the idols on the eve of his entrance to Mecca.⁵⁴ Literally, it means something false, spurious, worthless and vain.⁵⁵ In the Quran the notion of *batil* as a direct contrast to truth carries with it another negative behavioural trait, that of knowingly concealing the truth and compounding it with error.⁵⁶ All forms of *batil* are illusory, like bubbles or foam that will evaporate while the truth will settle down on earth by virtue of its continuous benefit to man.⁵⁷

It is thus clear that the truth occupies such a fundamental and sacrosanct position in Islamic epistemology and weltanschauung that its contradiction in any way or form is considered 'to be a blasphemy against God and His religion'. Hence to consider any aspect of the divine truth as lies or conjecture amounted to *kufr* (disbelief).⁵⁸ In this context, lying or inventing lies involves polytheism of different kinds, as is also the case with the promulgation of unauthorized religio-moral laws by arbitrary declaration of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden). It was shown earlier in this chapter that guidance (*huda*) is an essential component of the Islamic concept of knowledge. Thus, the antithesis of guidance is error (*dalal*, *dalala*),⁵⁹ which, like so many important ethical-religious terms of the Quran, possesses a rather vast network of relationships, with *kufr*, *shirk*, *takdhib*, and *zulm* being the *bêtes noires* of Islamic virtues. It seems clear that straying from the right

path into error is caused by whims or uncontrolled desires (*hawaa*, *ahwa*), as for example in 28:50: 'who is further astray than he who follows his own *hawa* without guidance from God? Verily God guides not the *zalim* people.' *Hawa* is in direct contrast with knowledge.⁶⁰ Following one's *hawa* would have such a negative effect on one's intellectual and moral faculties that the Quran equates *hawa* with the worshipping of it, that is, making it as one's God:

Hast thou seen him who has taken his *hawa* for his God, and [consequently] God has led him astray, and has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and has placed a covering upon his eyesight? Who shall then, guide him after God? (45:22; 25:45)

However, as Izutsu also notes, the *error* which was committed preceding the coming of knowledge via the revelation is not regarded with contempt or disapproval (as in 3:158 and 62:2), because 'the problem of *kufr* in the strict sense of the word [had not] properly arise[n] yet'.⁶¹

It is perhaps safe to assert that *zann*, *shakk*, *batil*, *kadhib*, and *dalala* all connote the deepest level of intellectual, spiritual, and ethical negatives for Islam only because they consciously oppose the clear evidence of Quranic truth. There seems to be no criticism of the natural errors and mistakes that are involved in the sincere pursuit of the truth and especially prior to the advent of revealed truth. From this perspective perhaps, human enquiries into all levels and fields of knowledge that form God's words and works, as long as they seek to fulfil the *raison d'être* of man's sojourn on earth as His vice-regent based on and inspired by the divine guidance, are not only permitted, but positively encouraged.

Methods and Purpose of Knowledge

Basically, there are two sources of knowledge that the Quran recognizes—revelation (*uahy*) and human reason (*aql*). It seems that *uahy* is sent to different creations of God including man. Hence, the cosmos and creatures like the bees are said to have received 'revelation' in the sense of their rational constituents (*amr*, *qadr*) and survival instincts respectively. The angels and certain humans such as the mother of Moses were inspired to do specific acts that were historically decisive, but in both cases they neither carried any Divine messages nor prophecy nor laws;⁶² only the prophets were given all these three as constituent elements of revelation. It is, however, important to under-

line that the prophets received revelation in their hearts although on certain occasions they heard and saw the agents of revelation. This is significant because the sites of intellect, reasoning and contemplation in ordinary man are also referred to as the different 'layers' of the heart (*qalb*), such as the *sadr* (chest), *fuad* (innerheart) and *lubb* (the intellect).⁶³ Even though the Quran places a high priority on thinking and contemplation, the term *aql* (reason or intellect) is never used. It seems that the primary interest of the Quran is to emphasize the act and process of knowing rather than the physical locus of knowledge. The processes of thinking and knowing in the Quran are conveyed by several verbs, such as *aqila*, *faqih*, *tafakkara*, *hasiba*, *zanna*, *itibara*, *tadabbara* and *hakima*, all of which must originate in sense perception. Thought in Islam should be grounded in facts or data, either from nature, man's physical or psychological realities and the movements of history. Even in thinking and contemplating the unseen existence of God, for example, the Quran appeals to the human mind to reason from the basis of the natural, historical and psychical environment.

It thus seems logical that the Quran should place a heavy responsibility on the faculty of sense perception; all human faculties will be held accountable on Judgment Day.⁶⁴ Hence in 17:36 man is asked not to follow anything without knowledge for hearing, sight and the heart will be questioned in the Hereafter. The tongue, hands and feet and the skin will also testify against man on Judgment Day, which undoubtedly assumes their ability to acquire valid knowledge. In this way, we can confidently assert that the Quran holds that the human mind, to an important degree, can attain objective knowledge that transcends the socio-historical location of the researcher.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the Quranic usage of the important epistemological terms *aya* and *ibra*, as well as the close connection between knowledge and faith and God-consciousness, clearly indicates the importance of the researcher's weltanschauung in many key facets of knowledge acquisition and utilization.

Ibra means passing on, over, through, by, or beyond something usually related to the banks or borders of a river, valley, chasm or a rock hole. The various concrete and conceptual meanings are derived from this primary act of connecting two points across an intervening space.⁶⁶ In the Quran, the term *ibra* is commonly used in relation to history, although in several places, the term is also used in connection with God's creations in Nature. The use of the word *ibra* in connection with history, as Professor Muhsin Mahdi has eloquently stated, meant:

... both negative admonition, and positive guidance and direction of future action. It warned the community against certain patterns of action, and urged it to learn from the good deeds of the past and to imitate them ... [It meant], essentially, the activity of looking for the unity of plan underlying the multiplicity of events, of grasping the permanence pervading their ever-changing and destructible character, and of using the results of such reflections in the management of practical affairs.⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that many classical jurists such as Abu Bakr al-Jassas and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi who supported the use of analogy in jurisprudence used the verse 59:2 which cites a specific historical event as a major justification.⁶⁸ This development, though creative, is rather ironic because many jurists and dialectical theologians would restrict the use of reason in historical interpretation and understanding, content to rely solely on reports which are considered certain. The philosophically trained historian, like Ibn Khaldun or al-Biruni, would consider history as the knowledge of particular events with rational bases and explanations.⁶⁹

The process of thinking and knowing, as mentioned earlier, must be based on objective data and facts. The Quranic emphasis on the intimate relationship between epistemology and axiology and spirituality was not intended to alter the objectivity of the properly verified data and facts; rather it was purported to provide proper guidance, insights and meanings regarding the various dimensions of epistemological enterprise. The concept of knowledge in Islam is thus purposive through and through, which in turn fits ideally in the imperatives of its weltanschauung. The entirety of Muslim scholars are right in holding that the primary purpose of knowledge is to know God.⁷⁰ Even though they differ as to the degrees of this knowledge, the purpose behind this seems to be quite clear, as we have already seen: that the knowledge of God's attributes would positively affect human ethical-moral conduct. Knowing God would also mean having the knowledge concerning man's purpose in this universe and the knowledge regarding the fulfilment of that purpose. Hence, it becomes necessary to have a proper knowledge of the Quranic message and Prophetic conduct. All the other sciences and actions should emerge from, and be inspired by, such knowledge so that man can truly carry out the trust of God's vice-regency. The importance or the priority of any other sciences or actions would be directly proportional to their contribution to this objective. Then, every epistemological endeavour

would be an *ijihad* and every action would be *jihad*, both of which are the highest acts of serving God.

The Concept of Knowledge in the Prophetic Tradition

I have deliberately separated the treatment of the concept of knowledge in *hadith* literature from that in the Quran, although admitting that the authentic *hadith* should be part of an integral understanding of the Quran. Apart from the convenience that this separate approach provides, it also gives me greater opportunity to address some issues that are strictly applicable to *hadith* literature from an epistemological viewpoint.

Early collections of *hadith* do not reflect much concern about the concept of knowledge shown by the Prophet. The earliest extant collection of *hadith*, the *Sahifah Hammam ibn Munabbih*, compiled by a student of Abu Hurairah, companion of the Prophet and *hadith* narrator, has only three statements from the Prophet that could be included in *Kitab al-ilm* of later *hadith* collections. There is a *hadith* indicating the fact that knowledge will be lifted off at the end of the world—meaning that a sign of the coming of the Day of Judgment is through the death of great creative scholars who are irreplaceable. The statement that comes closest to dealing with learning or education may be sought in *hadith* number sixty-six which declares that every child is born in *fitra* (that is, Islam) and it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian.⁷¹

There is a similar lack of *hadith* on knowledge in the great legal collection, *al-Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas (d. 795 CE). Although there exists a chapter on 'The Searching After Knowledge', the contents contain only one narration on the advice of the Prophet Luqman: 'Son, sit at the feet of the scholars and close to them, for God gives life to the heart through the light of wisdom (*al-hikma*), like as He gives life to the dead soil through rain from heaven.'⁷² The Prophet is reported to have said that if the Lord desires to do good to any man, He endows him with deep understanding in matters of religion; and in another *hadith*, the Prophet declared that Fate determines everything including incapacity and intelligence.⁷³

The glaring void of statements from the Prophet on knowledge in the earliest *hadith* literature is baffling, because, as we have seen in the Quran, direct reference to knowledge exists even in the first revelation (96:1-5). It is, however, possible to suppose that both Ibn Munabbih and Malik were unaware of the genuine traditions on this subject,

since the proper science of tradition had yet to be developed. It is also possible that in their generation *ilm* had not yet become a problem in traditionalist religious thinking and scholarly methodology.⁷⁴ By al-Shafii's time (d. 820 CE) however, the subject was discussed by jurists of different schools of thought, and this precipitated his monumental systemization of Islamic legal knowledge. Parallel with this development was the flourishing of the rationalist ideas of the Mutazilites during the reign of the Abbassid Caliph al-Mamun, whose rise to office in 814 CE signalled the official adoption of the Mutazilite ideas.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the traditions that al-Shafii quoted in his *Risala* are to be found in later *hadith* literature, but it is surprising that he did not mention any *hadith* about thinking, understanding or personal opinion in his discussion on important topics such as *qiyas* and *ijihad*.⁷⁶ He did narrate the *hadith* confirming the two rewards granted to a jurist who was correct and a single reward if wrong. He also narrated a tradition which later served to justify and explain the prevalence of *hadith* transmitters and memorizers:

God will grant prosperity to his servant who hears my words, remembers them, writes them, and hands them on. Many a transmitter of law is no lawyer himself, and many may transmit law to others who are better versed in the law than they.⁷⁷

It is important to point out that to al-Shafii, knowledge meant the establishment of legal principles on the basis of the four fundamental sources: the Quran, the *hadith*, the *ijma* and *qiyas*.

The salient features that can be extracted from the most important *hadith* literature in Sunni Islam in many respects complement the concept of knowledge that emerges from the Quran. However, discussion on *hadith* is always difficult because of the sheer volume and variety as well as the difficulty of interpretation.

The idea of the infinitude of knowledge, culminating in God's Omniscience which is the apex of all knowledge, is clearly expressed in the chapter 45 in al-Bukhari's 'Book of Knowledge' wherein is found the story of Moses (who claimed that he was the most learned person among his people) who was inspired to seek a servant of God who was more learned. The *hadith* says that this man, traditionally known as al-Khidr, said to Moses:

O Moses! I have some of the knowledge of Allah which He has taught me and which you do not know, while you have some knowledge which Allah has taught you which I do not know.

From this *hadith* it is obvious that al-Khidr's superiority of knowledge did not cover the prophetic sciences and legal authority but was limited to areas of practical wisdom.⁷⁸ Hence, only God knows everything whereas even the prophets may still need to learn more from other human beings in areas that do not constitute revelational knowledge. The quantity of knowledge, as indicated in *hadith* literature, may decrease or be lost altogether through the death of scholars or through their failure to transmit their knowledge.⁷⁹ The loss of knowledge is considered one of the signs of the proximity of Judgment Day.⁸⁰

It appears that the concept of knowledge in *hadith* literature is slightly more restrictive and narrower than that of the Quran. The Prophet is reported to have said that knowledge is of three categories: a clear verse, an established practice and a moderate obligation.⁸¹ He urged people to avoid dealing with those who discuss the ambiguous verses; and he warned people against disputing or disagreeing about the content of the Quran.⁸² *Hadith* literature includes many stories about the attitudes and activities of the earlier people, particularly the Jews and the Christians, from which certain religious-moral lessons are intended. Hence, it can be inferred that in this sense the *hadith* complements the Quran in attributing great significance to historical knowledge. However, there seems to be no reference at all in the major *hadith* corpus about the importance of the other two arenas of knowledge—the natural and the psychological worlds—to which the Quran frequently draws our attention.

This attitude of religious caution is reflected in one tradition in which the Prophet seems to propose the adoption of an indifferent attitude towards the knowledge of non-Muslims:

Whatever the People of the Book tell you, do not verify them, nor falsify them, but say: we believe in Allah and His Apostle. If it is false, do not confirm it; if it is true, do not falsify it.⁸³

The indifferent or neutral stance is balanced by two other *hadith* in the same collection in which the Prophet not only permitted the narrations of traditions from Banu Israil but himself used to narrate them without interruption except to perform obligatory prayers.⁸⁴ Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the profusion of Jewish lore in Muslim religious literature that is considered by classical modernists as being partly responsible for obscuring the pristine teachings of Islam.⁸⁵ Thus, my earlier assertion that the concept of knowledge in *hadith* literature seems to be treated more narrowly than in the Quran should not be

accepted without reservations. The multiple and everlasting reward for initiating a good practice which, in the *hadith* relates to a social good, implies the necessity of innovating various kinds of knowledge that can be harnessed for common benefit. On the other hand the initiator of a bad practice, if followed by society, will receive continuous punishment.⁸⁶ It is mentioned that the first son of Adam who committed the first murder would be partly responsible for every unjust killing thereafter, because he had 'instituted the *sunna* of killing'.⁸⁷ Such traditions should spur Muslims to strive hard to develop socially beneficial ideas and institutions that would be long-lasting, while simultaneously making them cautious about temporary and destructive ideas and works. The traditions that allow jealousy to be shown only towards a wealthy man who spends righteously and a wise person who teaches others, and the three factors that produce eternal rewards are ever-recurring donation, beneficial knowledge and a pious offspring, all complement the above notion.⁸⁸ These works presuppose and require a knowledge of commerce, the sciences, educational psychology and child development all grounded in an Islamic world-view to ensure maximum rewards.

In *hadith* literature the relationship between knowledge and action is more direct than in the Quran. There are several traditions that promise hellfire for those who seek knowledge for other than the pleasure of Allah, that is, for worldly advantages.⁸⁹ The Prophet used to pray: 'O Lord! Let me benefit from what You have taught me, teach me things that benefit me, and increase for me knowledge.'⁹⁰ On the whole, just like the Quran which roots its most basic and important spiritual-psychological concepts—*tawhid* in knowledge as in 47:19 'know that there is no God but He . . . '—*hadith* literature maintains that knowledge is prior to everything else. The Prophet once mentioned to Abu Dharr that learning a chapter of the Quran with or without consequent action, is better than one thousand *rakaas* of optional prayer.⁹¹

The positive relationship between religiosity, defined in a broad manner, and knowledge (and its synonyms) which has been demonstrated in this analysis of the Quran, is also clearly evident in *hadith* literature. The innumerable traditions depicting the importance of knowledge and the superiority of scholars to mere worshippers testify to this fact. Indeed, the ability to understand religion well is a bounty from God.⁹² People who are psychologically and spiritually perverted, from the Islamic perspective, such as the hypocrites, are devoid of the true understanding of the religion and good morals.⁹³

The emphasis on knowledge in *hadith* literature actually deals

largely, though not exclusively, with religious sciences, particularly the transmission of *hadith* and jurisprudence. The duty of getting and transmitting exact religious information that has direct implications for one's religious practice and credal doctrine and a person's consequent fate in the Hereafter, inevitably justifies the reliance on memorization as one of the most important methods of acquiring knowledge. In its historical and sociological setting, where the use of paper was not yet widespread, memorization was not only necessary but was the most pragmatic tool for mass education.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, in later Muslim intellectual history memorization and rote learning replaced understanding and thought to a very large extent.

It is interesting to note that the prophetic traditions do not seem to promote memorization above understanding. al-Bukhari merely narrates several traditions regarding Abu Hurairah's efforts in learning, and the Prophet's contribution to the former's excellent memory by covering him with a mantle.⁹⁵ It is an indubitable fact that good memorization which accurately provides facts and information is an essential component of, but not a substitute for, learning and thinking. Thinking would be false, unrealistic and dangerous without accurate facts and information. The Prophet's stern warning that those who purposely distort facts about him would be thrown in hell should be understood not only as a statement discouraging lying, but even more importantly, as an affirmation of the positive role of memorization for true understanding:

May God brighten a man who hears a tradition from us, gets it by heart and passes it on to others. Many a hearer of knowledge convey it to him who is more understanding than he is, and many a bearer of knowledge is not understanding of it.⁹⁶

The term *ilm* and *fiqh* were understood during the Prophet's time to be almost synonymous. The term *fiqh* 'carried a wider meaning covering all aspects of Islam, namely theological, political, economic and legal'.⁹⁷ The term *fiqh* or its other verbal forms that occur frequently in *hadith* literature should be interpreted in this general manner, rather than as referring to the specific discipline of jurisprudence whose meaning it acquired in a later period.

The Prophet is said to have prayed for Abd Allah ibn al-Abbas for the understanding of religion (*tafaqquh fil-din*).⁹⁸ He also mentioned that good non-Muslims would remain good in Islam if they had the understanding of religion (*idha faqih*).⁹⁹ The meaning certainly corre-

sponds to the broad and deep understanding of the Islamic weltanschauung which includes other necessary religious disciplines. This interpretation is in accord with the Quranic usage of *tafaqquh fil-din* in 9:22.

In relation to this, the usage and meaning of the term *aql* (intellect) and its synonyms like *hilm* and *nuhan* need to be addressed. As in the Quran, these terms in *hadith* literature generally denote awareness, realization (*al-idrak*) or understanding (*al-faham*).¹⁰⁰ There is, however, intense controversy regarding the traditions where *al-aql* seems to mean an independent metaphysical entity with an ontological status, such as that found in the writings of Ahmad ibn Hanbal and al-Ghazali. Many *hadith* scholars like Ibn Hibban (d. 965 CE), Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya (d. 1350 CE) and Ibn Iraqi (d. 1550 CE) rejected the authenticity of such *hadith*.¹⁰¹ Dr al-Munjid has made an excellent analysis of the different views on this subject and concludes that the total rejection of the *hadith* on *aql* by the traditionalists is not logical, but indicates their stagnation or conservatism because the origin of praising the *aql* occurs in the Quran itself. There is nothing in these *hadiths* that contradicts the limits of the *sharia* defined by the Quran.

Be that as it may, the Quran has certainly challenged man to use his reason in many different ways. At the same time, both the Quran and *hadith* literature generally encourage thinking and understanding. Therefore, the existence of certain prophetic warnings against the use of personal opinions (*ray*) should be interpreted as specifically intended for those who are ignorant and unqualified rather than as a general rule.¹⁰² The general rule should be based on a famous tradition in which the Prophet applauded the answer of Muadh bin Jabal that in the absence of evidence from the Quran and the *Sunna*, he would do his utmost to form his own judgement.¹⁰³

The dynamic concept of knowledge that emerges from our analysis of the Quran and the major *hadith* literature seems to be upheld by early Muslims despite their primitive intellectual concerns, and their preoccupation with socio-political matters. The period from the caliphate of Umar al-Khattab until the beginning of the fourth century of the Islamic era witnessed an application of a dynamic concept of knowledge which produced no less than nineteen different schools in the field of jurisprudence alone.¹⁰⁴

Notes

1. al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*.
2. al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*.

3. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 194.
4. For a comprehensive definition of the Muslims' definition of knowledge, see Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 46-69.
5. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'a-l-m'. Also Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*.
6. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'ilm'.
7. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 6-12.
8. The *hadith* says: 'Woe to him who recites these verses without contemplating them,' and another version, 'Woe to him who constantly mentions [these verses] between his lips without contemplating them,' al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*.
9. Cited in Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 109.
10. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 37.
11. In 17:85 it says, 'the *ruh* is by the command of my Lord, and of knowledge, you are vouchsafed but a little.' The *ruh* literally means spirit, soul, breath of life, or vital principle. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'ruh'. In the Quran, it generally signifies inspiration, or more specifically divine inspiration as in 16:2; 40:15; and 17:85. See Asad, *Message*, pp. 393, 432. The angelic agent of revelation *Jibrail* is called *al-ruh al-amin* (26:193) and *ruh al-quds* (2:81). Ibn Kathir, while explaining the term *ruh* in 17:85, mentions that scholars are not decided on its exact meaning. Some interpret it to be *Jibrail* while others consider it as the human soul. See al-Sabuni *Mukhtasar* 2:397-98.
12. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1971 ed., s.v. 'ilm'.
13. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'zann'. Ibn Kathir in his *tafsir* of this verse cited early authorities such as Mujahid and Abu al-Aliya on this interpretation. He also notes that the Arabs use *zann* both for certainty (*al-yaqin*), and doubt (*al-shakk*); in the same manner they call darkness (*zulumat*), and brightness (*dijaa*), dusk or twilight (*sudfa*). See al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*; Asad, *Message*, also translates the *zann* here as 'know with certainty'.
14. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1953 ed., s.v. 'idjtihad'.
15. See al-Shafii, *Risala*.
16. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1953 ed., s.v. 'ijma', and 'idjtihad'. For detailed discussion on the evolution of the concept of *ijma* see Ahmad Hasan, *The Doctrine of Ijma in Islam*.
17. For a convincing argument on the need of co-operation between people of different truth-perspectives, the existence of which is a natural and necessary condition of man, see Rauche, *Contemporary Philosophical Alternatives*.
18. 7:185; 3:1981; 88:17-18. Ibn Rushd, *Fasl al-Maqal*.
19. For example, the prominent savant and encyclopaedist Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505 CE) considered the science of tradition (*Hadith*) as the noblest, while the study and use of logic (*ilm al-mantiq*) was forbidden. Cited by Sartain, *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti*. Others like Ibn Hazm (d. 1064 CE), the *zahir* (literalist), al-Ghazali, and all philosophers considered logic as a very important instrument for discerning between truth and falsehood. See Chejne, *Ibn Hazm*.
20. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'alim'.
21. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*. The Greeks, particularly in the philosophies developed by Socrates, and Plato also indicated a characteristic preoccupation with abstract thinking on the nature of things and seemed to show little interest in facts and the finite world. 'The effect on science in the long run is disastrous'. See Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages*. For a comparison between the abstract thinking of the Greeks and the general concrete tendency of the Quran, see Iqbal, *Reconstruction*.
22. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 155.
23. Asad, *Message*, p. 541.
24. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*, 2:605.
25. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*; and Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Quran*.
26. See for example, Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*.
27. Cited by Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology*.
28. Cited by al-Nawawi, *Matn al-Arba*.
29. Bertrand Russell, while arguing for the reality of the external world, emphasized the importance of instinctive beliefs, which may vary in strength, but must be the foundation of knowledge: 'All knowledge . . . must be built up upon our instinctive beliefs, and if these are rejected, nothing is left.' See Russell, *The Problem of Philosophy*, p. 25.
30. See also Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*. Some scholars of the Jews have been cited as testifying to the truth of Islamic revelation, for example in 26:196-7.
31. Wright, ed. *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*; and Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'alim'.
32. Such as *Hakim-l-Khabir*, *Hakim-l-Alim*, and *Khair-l-Hakimin*. For their places in the Quran, see Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufharis*.
33. al-Shafii, *Risala*; and al-Sibai, *al-Sunna*.
34. See al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*, 2:257.
35. Traditionally known as *Khidr*. See al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 1:90-3.
36. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 120.
37. As opposed to *him* which signifies calmness and level-headedness. See Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms*.
38. al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, p. 18.
39. al-Hujwiri, *Kashf*.
40. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'jahil'.
41. Izutsu, *Structure of Ethical Terms*; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 33-5.
42. 3:154, 5:50, 33:33-4, 48:26-8.
43. See 12:33; 6:33-5; 7:134-6; 11:27-9; 28:55; 39:64-5, etc.
44. See the graphic metaphorical description of the state of those who reject faith, and the hypocrites, in 2:6-20 where some of the epistemological negatives or metaphors are juxtaposed. Also see 19:22.
45. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 300.
46. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'shakk', 'shubha'.
47. al-Fayyumi, *al-Misbah al-Munir*, s.v. 'jahil'; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*.
48. al-Edrus, 'The Concept of *ilm* in the Quran'.
49. See also 11:62, 110; 14:9; 41:45 and 42:14.
50. 27:67-68, 'The [Meccan] unbelievers say: "What! When we became dust—we and our forefathers—shall we really be raised [from the dead]? It is true we were promised this, we and our fathers before [us]. These are nothing but tales of the ancients.'" See also 10:94 and see Rahman, *Major Themes*.
51. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'bayyina'. See Rahman, *Major Themes*.

52. Rahman, *Major Themes*, pp. 73, 74; also Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'burhan', 'sultan'.
53. See also Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 300.
54. al-Sabuni, *Mukhtasar*, 2:396.
55. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'batil'.
56. 2:39, 140-42; 3:64, and others.
57. 13:17. See also 17:81 and 34:49.
58. Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms*, p. 92.
59. The term guidance is also conveyed by *rushd* as in 2:257; 40:30 and 72:1-2. Error or going astray is also conveyed by numerous terms such as *ghawā* (*ghayy*) (2:257; 20:119-20), *zaigh* (3:5-6) and *amiha/amiha* (27:4). See also Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms*.
60. 2:140 and 30:28; Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms*.
61. Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms*, p. 196.
62. Afnan, *A Philosophical Lexicon*.
63. For a very interesting elucidation of the functions of the different 'layers' of the heart, see al-Tirmidhi, *Bayan al-Farq*.
64. For a brief definition of this faculty, see Sheikh, *A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy*; cf. al-Taftazani, *A Commentary*.
65. For a powerful critique of the socio-historically deterministic nature of knowledge and a defence of the autonomy of the mind, see Shils, 'Knowledge and Sociology of Knowledge'.
66. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. 'ibra'. cf. Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*.
67. Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 68.
68. It reads: 'It is He Who expelled from their habitations the unbelievers from the People of the Book at the first mastering. You did not think that they would go forth, as they thought that their fortresses would defend them against God; then God came upon them from whence they had not reckoned . . . therefore take heed, you, who have eyes.' Cf. Hasan, 'The Justification of Qiyas'.
69. Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun*.
70. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 142.
71. Hamidullah, *Sahifah Hammam ibn Munabbih*.
72. Ibn Anas, *Muwatta*, 2:328.
73. Ibid.
74. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*.
75. Khadduri, *Islamic Jurisprudence*.
76. al-Shafii, *Risala*.
77. al-Shafii, *Risala*, p. 287; cf. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 1:58.
78. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 1:90-92.
79. Ibid. and al-Qushayri, *Sahih al-Muslim*.
80. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*.
81. Ibn Maja, *Sunan ibn Maja*.
82. Muslim, *Sahih*.
83. al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, 4:59-60.
84. Ibid., 4:69-70.
85. See Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*.
86. Muslim, *Sahih*; Ibn Maja, *Sunan*.
87. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*.
88. al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*.
89. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4:71; Ibn Maja, *Sunan*, 1:93; Ibn Abd al-Barr, *al-Jami* 1:175-76.
90. Ibn Maja, *Sunan*, 1:92.
91. Ibid.
92. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*; Ibn Maja, *Sunan*.
93. al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*.
94. Paper was produced in the Islamic lands only in the late ninth century CE during the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid: see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. 'Paper and Paper Production'.
95. al-Bukhari, *Sahih*.
96. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4:69; for a slightly different wording see also, al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 1:58; and Ibn Maja, *Sunan*, 1:84-86.
97. Hasan, *Early Development*.
98. Ibid.; citing Ibn Hisham, al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 1:64; narrates it as *allamhu* [teach him] which conveys the same meaning.
99. al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat*.
100. al-Munjiid, *al-Islam*.
101. Ibid.
102. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4:63-64; for a similar meaning but different *hadith*, see al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 9:305. In *Sunan*, 4:5, Abu Dawud strongly criticizes those judges who did not correctly apply their knowledge and those who decided ignorantly.
103. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4:18; Ibn Abd al-Barr, *Jami*, 2:56; also in almost all the six *hadith* works except Bukhari and Muslim.
104. For a good critical survey of Umar's pioneering activity in Islamic intellectual practice, see Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*; Iqbal, *Reconstruction*.

5

The Educational Implications for Malaysia

In this section I hope to elucidate some major educational implications of the concept of knowledge that I have been propounding with special reference to Malaysia. Modern Malaysia, which gained political independence from Britain in August 1957, is a complex multi-racial and multi-religious nation consisting of the indigenous Bumiputras, and the immigrant Chinese and Indians whose arrival was the direct result of British colonial economic policy. The population of Malaysia is 15.8 million, about 13 million of whom reside in Peninsular Malaysia. The Bumiputras (literally 'son of the soil') who consist primarily of Malays, are almost 100 per cent Muslim. They comprise 56.5 per cent of the population, while 32.8 per cent are Chinese, 10.1 per cent Indian and 0.6 per cent of other origins.¹

The Bumiputras, particularly the Malays, are the inheritors of political power; yet they are educationally and economically the most backward group in their own country. Thirteen years after independence, in 1970, the Malays constituted two-thirds of the agricultural, forestry and fishing sectors, traditionally the poorest income-yielding sectors, but were less than a quarter of those in the more lucrative fields of mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction and commerce. They owned only 1.9 per cent of share capital of the nation's limited companies compared with the 22.5 per cent, owned by the Chinese. Educationally, the Malays took up less than half of the tertiary places, the majority being in diploma courses and a smaller

number in degree programmes. Even then, they concentrated mainly on the liberal arts courses; only 12 per cent were in science and technology programmes.²

Malay frustration arising from awareness of their painful predicament in their own country was sparked by Chinese provocation in their victory celebrations following the May 1969 general elections. The bloodiest racial riots in Malaysian history ensued with hundreds of lives lost and millions of dollars worth of property destroyed.³ The Malaysian government then formulated the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the national ideology, the *Rukunegara* (Pillars of the Nation) in an attempt at forging unity. These two formulations and the Education Act of 1961 became the cornerstones of the Malaysian educational policy.

The NEP envisaged an ambitious two-pronged objective: the restructuring of Malaysian society so that no racial group would be identified with any particular economic or employment sectors, and the elimination of poverty by raising employment opportunities irrespective of race. However, the effort to ensure that the Malays and other Bumiputras obtain at least a 30 per cent share in the ownership of domestic-owned enterprises in the modern agricultural and industrial sectors by 1990 has been only partially realized. By 1985 Bumiputra individuals and trust organizations owned only 17.8 per cent of the nation's share capital of limited companies; and by 1987 the Malays owned only 22 per cent of the commercial and industrial sectors. Perhaps the greatest achievement is in the field of education where Bumiputras fill 66.6 per cent of places in diploma programmes; in Degree programmes they occupy 62.8 per cent of the Arts and 83.2 per cent of Science and Technology enrollments.⁴

However, the problems and challenges of multi-ethnicity remain the most important factor in the psyche of modern Malaysia. Thus national unity has become the primary aim and function of Malaysian education and is explicitly stated in all five-year Malaysian plans.

Islam, which came to Peninsular Malaya in the thirteenth century, is accorded the status of the religion of the Federation by the Malaysian Constitution Article 3(1). Other religions are guaranteed constitutional freedom.⁵ The Malay language, now known as Bahasa Malaysia has been declared the national language. Other languages are allowed to be taught in national schools if requested by parents of fifteen or more students.

The Malaysian government, under the leadership of Dr Mahathir

Muhammad, launched a moderate form of Islamization in the early 1980s to inculcate universal Islamic values in the government machinery.⁶ This drive towards a value-oriented society based on Islam is certainly new in post-colonial Malaysia. The official call for the integral involvement of Islamic values in the national development plan was incorporated for the first time in the Fifth Malaysia Plan of 1986-90.⁷ In his Foreword address Dr Muhammad gives the assurance that 'harmony between material and spiritual development will continue to be stressed for the well-being of the nation.' This assurance is amplified in the document itself in a two-page section on 'Re-emphasis on Values for Development'.⁸

The relatively moderate and successful Islamization approach of Malaysia has attracted some positive attention. *Arabia*, a monthly magazine of Islamic affairs published from London, recently called it 'the closest thing to a model Islamic state one can find in our time', adding:

It is a fairly democratic country, reasonably prosperous and is a model of racial harmony and internal peace. It is also progressing slowly but surely towards the goal of being an ideal Islamic state, a state in which the half of its citizens who are not Muslim gain more and become even more active in shaping this model.⁹

In the light of the Islamization process in Malaysia, discussion of issues relevant to education are necessary; and, as elaborated in the first part of this book, it is crucial to establish an Islamic concept of knowledge upon which to base an educational system. I would therefore like to deal with the aims, content and methods of education within a Malaysian context.

Implications of Educational Aims

As has already been established, Islam places man in a unique position of simultaneously being God's vicegerent and servant. Though the first role extends only to man's existence on earth and the second is permanent, the success of the latter depends entirely on the successful performance of the former. They are intrinsically linked. Therefore, the most fundamental aim of education in Islam is the development of individuals whose intellectual capacity, physical ability and spiritual depth cope with such roles concurrently. This aim is universally accepted by all Muslims and was exemplified by the recommendations

of the First World Conference on Islamic Education in Mecca, held in Saudi Arabia in 1977.

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of Man through the training of Man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses. The training imparted to a Muslim must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality and creates in him an emotional attachment to Islam and enables him to follow the Quran and the Sunna and be governed by the Islamic system of values willingly and joyfully so that he may proceed to the realization of his status as *Khalifatullah* to whom Allah has promised the authority of the universe; . . . Education should promote in man the creative impulse to rule himself and the universe as a *true servant of Allah* not by opposing and coming into conflict with Nature but by understanding its laws and harnessing its forces for the growth of a personality that is in harmony with it.¹⁰

The above statement deals only with the most general and permanent aims of Islamic education. I suggest that it needs to be broken down into objectives for covering the spiritual/affective, cognitive, and psycho-motor domains. They will, in turn, be further subdivided into more specific objectives, although many points will overlap, for a rigid demarcation between them is neither desirable nor possible.¹¹

Spiritual/Affective. The objectives of Islamic education are to develop and cultivate:

- an awareness of God's universal munificence, omnipotence in all thoughts and actions;
- an awareness of the integrated nature of Islamic weltanschauung; the respective position and relationship of its various components to one another;
- a consciousness of the status and destiny of human beings on earth and their relationship to God, the universe and their fellow beings;
- an awareness of the importance, and the respect for all those involved in the pursuit of knowledge, learning and teaching;
- a commitment to be actively involved in learning, teaching and their related activities as a fundamental religious obligation and virtue;
- the power to be alert and discriminating about the Islamic ethical

and axiological perspectives in conducting one's individual and collective life;

the willingness to comply with the known Islamic injunctions;

pleasure and contentment in performing altruistic works;

patience and dignity in the face of trials and tribulations in pursuing the Islamic goals;

the desire, responsibility and courage to seek, express and defend what is true, just and humane;

the dislike for, and the commitment to correct, all that is evil, unjust and the opposites of knowledge in a wise and proper manner.

Intellectual/Cognitive. The objectives in this domain are to:

possess information/facts about, and the understanding of, all the constituent elements within the Islamic weltanschauung, articles of faith, religious rituals and injunctions, and prophetic history as a unitary and coherent whole;

understand the permanent and historically-relative aspects of the Islamic *Sharia*, their comprehension and implementation by the Prophet, his companions and later jurists;

re-interpretation or reconstruction of such aspects of Islamic traditions in the light of the overwhelming and powerful new facts and findings;

to extend knowledge and analysis of ritualistic, judicial, economic, socio-political and military trends;

apply Islamic ideas and ideals to the historical circumstances in the personal and collective domains;

have knowledge of facts, principles, theories, of the various scientific, historical, socio-anthropological, psychological and religious fields and interpret and synthesize them within the unitary world-view of Islam.

Psycho-motor skills. The objectives in this domain are to acquire:

the verbal formulation and psychological intent of focusing all deeds for the pleasure of God;

the ability to recite and understand important passages of the Quran that are needed for ritual obligations, such as prayers;

the physical ability to perform all the duties incumbent upon the individual and the collectivity;

the practice of Islamic intellectual, social, economic and political ideals by simulation, role playing, and direct-involvement.

Social purposes. The social objectives are to:

ensure the continuation of social institutions and spirit, such as the establishment of a strong family unit, socio-economic justice, promotion of educational, moral and spiritual development of the community, the practice of *shura*, and all *kifayah* obligations when necessary;

inculcate awareness of the widespread and dangerous problems of physical, material, political and chemical abuse; of divisions among Muslims in particular and mankind in general; all forms of discrimination and consequently to strive towards its elimination for the betterment of the *umma* and world community;

develop the next generation to be conscious of all the problems facing the *umma* and mankind, and consequently to strive harder than we are now doing towards their solutions.

Despite the fact that there is an Islamization programme in Malaysia, 'there is no single document in which the philosophy of education for the country is explicitly or categorically stated.'¹² Directions of Malaysian educational philosophy can be deduced only from documents dealing with national and educational projects and developments. The preamble of the 1961 Education Act states that its policy of education is 'to satisfy the needs of the Nation and promote its cultural, social, economic and political development'. The most important aims of Malaysian education are national unity and manpower training to develop national resources for development. These general and brief statements do not provide any systematic and coherent axiological paradigm for education.

Similarly, the national ideology, *Rukunegara*, while containing five sound principles—belief in God, loyalty to king and country, upholding the constitution, rule of law, and good behaviour and morality—are isolated pillars that are not properly connected.

The goals of Malaysian education have recently been stated by the Ministry of Education to be as follows:

Individual. To nurture a balanced development in each individual by providing for the growth of physical, intellectual, emotional, moral

and aesthetic potentials as a Malaysian up-holding the tenets of *Rukunegara*.

Societal. To assist the individual to obtain greater insights and understanding into our ecological and cultural heritage, social institutions, values and practices, societal pressures and challenges. To enable the individual to function and fulfil his commitments and responsibilities as a citizen.

Economic. To develop the human resources of the nation by assisting the individual to be a skilled, competent, rational and responsible planner, producer and consumer to enable him to improve his personal well-being and contribute to the progress and development of the nation.

Political. To develop in the individual understanding and acceptance of the democratic ideas and ideals under the constitution, loyalty to the King, patriotism to the nation, awareness of his rights and responsibilities as a citizen in a democracy and commitment to exercise these rights and responsibilities.

Modernity. To develop in the individual a positive attitude towards scientific enquiry and technical processes and progress, self-reliance, desire and capability for life-long education to enable him to initiate and adapt to changes compatible with the cultural and ethical values and aspirations of the nation.

International Peace and Understanding. To promote international peace and understanding in the individual through the study of other nations from geographical, historical, sociological, economic and political perspectives and their relationship with Malaysia. To sensitize individuals to issues confronting human-kind and develop in them understanding and appreciation of international effort towards peace and cooperation.¹³

These goals and objectives are generally not contradictory to those described a few paragraphs above and to the *elan* of Islam described in chapter 2; yet one cannot say that they are Islamic. The concepts of *ubudiyya* and *khilafa* which are the backbone of an Islamic world-view should explicitly guide the process of education, but nowhere in the corpus of official governmental publications are there any statements supporting the Islamic notion of educating man as God's vice-regent

and servant. This absence is evident even in the statement of the aims and objectives of Islamic Religious Knowledge (*Pengetahuan Agama Islam*) whether at the primary or the secondary level.¹⁴ Despite this official omission considerable material pertaining to these two concepts—and particularly that of *ubudiyya*—is stated and taught.

It is only very recently that these key aims have been included in the field of Islamic religious instruction. The aim of Islamic Instruction in the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah*, or KBSM) to be implemented in a couple of years is that 'the Islamic Educational Program aims at developing a human being [*insan*] into a Muslim who is knowledgeable [*berilmu*], a believer [*beriman*] who performs good works [*beramal salih*] and possesses high morals [*berperibadi mulia*] according to the dictates of the Quran and *Sunna* towards fulfilling the responsibilities of being a pious servant and vice-regent of God.'¹⁵

In the field of higher education, it is perhaps only the University of Technology that has explicitly articulated its philosophy on an integrated Islamic basis. Its Vice-Chancellor, Tan Sri Datuk Professor Ainnuddin Bin Abdul Wahid, who is also a vocal proponent of the spiritual solutions to the current socio-moral predicaments of Malaysia, has stated that the institution aims to 'develop capable technologists who will be responsible to their Creator and society'.¹⁶ Hence all Muslim students must enrol in the Islamic Education programme, which covers Islamic issues, ethics, law and society, and students who fail cannot graduate. Non-Muslim students are required to take courses in morals and ethics.

The International Islamic University (IIU) established in 1983 at Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, which was directly inspired by the First World Conference on Islamic Education, has four major objectives: first, the revitalization of the Islamic concept of learning as an act of worship; second, the re-establishment of the primacy of Islam in all fields of knowledge consistent with the Islamic tradition; third, the revivification of the ancient Islamic tradition of learning as an aspect of *tawhid*; and fourth, the widening of 'the scope and options in higher learning and seeking to excel in all forms of academic achievement'. Even though this promising institution with its international co-sponsorship consisting of the Republic of the Maldives, Organization of Islamic Conference, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey, Libya and Malaysia is not an integral part of the Malaysian educational system, it nevertheless could serve as a model in Malaysia. In fact the presence of some non-Muslim Malaysians as students there is certainly a welcome sign.

I have sought to demonstrate that the most important determinant of the successful realization of human destiny, that is, being God's vice-regent and servant, is knowledge. With knowledge comes wisdom and justice. Even piety and God-consciousness can flourish only with knowledge. Therefore an Islamic education at all levels must instil in the minds of students the love of knowledge and respect for its carrier, the *ulama*, or scholars. The pursuit of knowledge as a life-long endeavour should be clearly and insistently stated. This phenomenon was indeed characteristic feature of early and medieval Islam, so much so that even though the concept of knowledge later become narrow and reduced to the specifically 'religious', nevertheless love and respect for knowledge, thus defined, remained strong.

This important educational goal has not been explicitly stated either in the general educational policy and objectives or in the more specific Islamic Religious knowledge syllabus of Malaysian education. Even in the process of the inculcation of Islamic values in government bureaucracy, the love and pursuit of knowledge has been omitted from the eleven values identified: honesty, responsibility, sincerity, dedication, moderation, hard-work, cleanliness, discipline, co-operation, good-morals and thankfulness.

Continuity of Education

At present education in Malaysia, as in many countries world-wide, is plagued with what Ronald Dore aptly calls the 'diploma disease', the frantic chasing after paper credentials, not for any intrinsic educational worth they presumably represent, but for their expected market and social-prestige value.¹⁷ Consequently, an increasing proportion of the population with higher academic or vocational diplomas has presented the Malaysian government with the problems of providing suitable jobs. These problems have been exacerbated by slow economic growth. In 1985 there were 488,000 unemployed which will increase to 684,200 by 1990, a majority of whom will be secondary school leavers and graduates in the age group of 15-24 years. There are about 35,000 unemployed graduates. There has been a new urgency to redirect the philosophy and objective of education to the pursuit of self-improvement through knowledge, creativity and moral discipline. Graduates have been urged not to seek white collar jobs only: graduates of the Agriculture University of Malaysia are being directed towards farming for there are 2.6 million hectares of unused land available.

However, education as a life-long activity extending beyond the limits of formal schooling has been accepted in Malaysia since the late 1970s. This development is part of the universal realization concerning the rapid expansion of knowledge; but in Islam, the philosophy of education as a life-long process is a direct consequence of the realization of the infinitude of knowledge.

Carrying out the obligations in the truest spirit of Islam whether those of *fard ain* or *kifaya* necessitates a continuous quest for knowledge involving new information and skills. Thus an Islamic educational system would agree with an extension of non-formal educational programmes, for example, various occupational and professional skill training programmes, agricultural and other types of extension services, adult literacy classes, and continuation studies at various educational levels. Many extended educational activities are already on offer in Malaysia through various government agencies and institutions including the regular religious and social educational programmes organized in mosques throughout the country. Even the concept of an 'Open University' has been suggested. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya, Royal Professor Engku Aziz, has called for all communication systems in the nation to be utilized to channel knowledge and skills to the population as is done in other nations like Britain.

The Content of Education

The curricular content of Islamic education is essentially unlimited; it can be organized not only to respond to different historical developments but also to shape them. The study of the Arabic language, the Quran and *hadith* is obligatory because Arabic leads to the last two which constitute the teachings of God and His Prophet respectively. Knowledge of medicine is also obligatory so that Muslims do not consume harmful foods and drinks, which are forbidden. The Messenger of God ordered medication, thus making it a duty to follow his command; he who neglects its study is negligent in his religious duty. He even said that astrology—a non-science—should be studied, 'in order to realize its falsity, for wrong cannot be known from right without a knowledge of astrology'.¹⁸

The categorization into *fard ain* and *kifaya* constitutes, respectively, the compulsory core and elective or specialization curriculum with a proper balance of the intellectual, moral-spiritual and physical. The notion of *fard ain* contents should not be confined to the basic tenets of

Iman and Islam (such as the knowledge of, and belief in, one God, prophets, angels, divine scriptures and God's determination of all matters, and the declaration of *kalima shahada*, the performance of the five daily prayers, fasting in the month of *Ramadan*, pilgrimage and payment of *zakat*-tax), but should expand according to one's cognitive ability, social responsibility, political position and economic capacity as well.

In the context of Malaysia, the compulsory nature of *fard ain* knowledge and skills should entail their being sufficiently included at all levels of education. A semblance of this has been achieved by Islamic religious instruction which was made compulsory for all Muslim students in the Education Act of 1961. The government has also been courageous and perceptive in providing a parallel and concurrent subject, Moral Education, for non-Muslim students. Unfortunately, neither of these subjects is examined, and the absence of this provision in a national education system which is still rooted in the examination mentality, has not given them the seriousness and weight they truly deserve. Many students absent themselves from these classes when the examination sessions are approaching to attend all sorts of extra-class or tuition in the subjects that are to be examined. Thus there are many Muslim secondary students who cannot even perform basic Islamic duties such as reading the Quran and saying obligatory prayers.

There is an urgent need to reorganize the syllabus of Islamic Religious Knowledge in Malaysia's primary and secondary schools to provide the students with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable them to handle their lives according to the dictates and spirit of Islam. At present only the personal obligatory rituals such as prayers, *zakat*, pilgrimage and some basic articles of faith are taught; and they are not integrated into the larger and more universal *elan* of Islam. The study of *zakat* and *hajj* in great detail is neither meaningful for adolescents nor useful for society for almost none of them will need to perform such obligations at that age. It would be sufficient for them to know that these are obligations; they should rather be taught the philosophy behind these religious obligations and their relationship to the larger world-view of Islam. Adolescents need to acquire an Islamic perspective on the personal socio-cultural aspects of life that confronts them in the context of their rapidly developing bodies and personalities and changing social environment. There is little of relevance in the present syllabi; however, some socially relevant aspects are included in the newly proposed syllabus of Islamic Religious Education in the New Secondary School Integrated Curriculum such

as *munakahat* (marriage and family matters) and the intellectual heritage of Islam for older students.

Comparative religious studies should also be included in Islamic Religious Instruction from the secondary school level. This would cover areas of similarity between Islam and other religions, thus promoting understanding and co-operation, and establish points of difference, so that intelligent and dignified differences can be maintained. Comparative discussion would foster a more harmonious society as well as protect Muslim youths who are susceptible and vulnerable to other religious influences. The latter point is important because thousands of young Muslim students seek further studies abroad, particularly in the West. (In 1985, for example, over 6,000 Bumiputras were studying in overseas institutions.) So far a comparative religion course has been offered only to fourth year students by the Department of Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, at the National University of Malaysia.

In classical Muslim education, the excellence, pursuit and transmission of knowledge has been incorporated within an Islamic world-view; but at no level of Malaysian education is there explicit mention of this fundamentally important theme. The newly proposed syllabus of Islamic education for secondary schools does refer to 'the importance of knowledge in Islam', but this is limited to the form four level only. It is imperative, if Islamic education is to be reconstructed for the benefit of its adherents and the world, that this theme of the excellence of knowledge, learning, teaching and the lives and contributions of scholars should become an integral part of all education.

Since thinking and all its components (analysis, interpretation, synthesis, coherency) are important aspects of the Islamic concept of knowledge and frequently emphasized by the Quran and *Sunna*, it is necessary that Islamic education should include training in these tasks. Relevant subjects would include logic and philosophy, for even though some philosophers have doubted, or even rejected religion outright, for the importance of philosophy as a tool in Islamic intellectual history is widely recognized. The development of the disciplines of jurisprudence, theology, ethics, history, and even mystical writings, is due to logical and philosophical thinking. It is detrimental to the very cause of religion when philosophy—and other positive sciences—are rejected because of their accidental attributes. In the declining period of Islam this position was adopted even by scholars who had done great works in the fields mentioned above. Thus al-Ghazali discouraged people not only from studying philosophy but

also the scientific works of philosophers; the fourteenth century jurist al-Shatibi denied that reason has any role in law-making and rejected philosophic thought because it is not action related; the seventeenth century Shaykh Ahmad al-Sirhindi also condemned philosophy and the sciences, including arithmetic and geometry.¹⁹

In Malaysia, as perhaps in many other countries, the awareness that being educated is not necessarily equivalent to having good thinking skills has grown considerably. Professor Engku Aziz has openly stated that our education system encourages memorizing rather than thinking and has called upon universities to offer courses in thinking techniques. As Chairman of the Malaysian Examination Council, he has noticed that students tend to rely on model answers, rote learning and spotted questions rather than on understanding concepts and theories.²⁰ At present courses offered at university level include critical thinking, reading and writing at the University of Science, Penang, and logic at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, National University of Malaysia. It is not necessarily the subject itself that encourages critical and creative thinking; rather, it is the teaching (and learning) approach and the atmosphere of tolerance in the classroom and society that stimulates this process.

It must be admitted that a certain amount of memorization is an integral part of learning and understanding. If one does not remember, how can one carry the knowledge beyond the moment of knowing it? Application becomes impossible if not dangerous if memory is faulty especially in areas where immediate application is needed, as in medicine. On the other hand, memorization without understanding is mechanical, uncreative and inert. In medieval Islam, despite the fame of men of extraordinary memory, a clear distinction was made between a person who merely memorized and somebody who understood.²¹

History is an important aspect of the Quran, and the study of it should be an integral part of the Islamic educational curriculum. At the primary level the teaching of history should appeal to romantic imagination, love of Muslim personalities, admiration of pious deeds, and appreciation of Islamic cultural heritage in general. At the secondary level the emphasis should be more on ethical history in the form of historical consciousness and participation and activism. At the university level a critical analysis of historical phenomena should be available and the idea inculcated that history is open to possibilities. In the first three grades of Malaysian primary schools history is not taught directly but as part of Local Studies emphasizing the economic,

social and political development of Malaysia and Southeast Asia. From the fourth grade to the ninth history is taught separately with special emphasis on national development and unity. The bifurcation of the arts and the sciences in Malaysian upper secondary education has denied science and technical stream students the chance to study history and the social sciences. However, the recent statements by the Minister of Education that he intends to make history a compulsory subject for science students is an excellent step in the proper direction. Within the context of Islamic Religious Knowledge history is taught in schools: from the earliest grade primarily as stories dealing with the life of Prophet Muhammad, his companions and previous prophets; a detailed account of Islamic history until the death of Mamun the Abbasid Caliph in secondary schools. It seems that history teaching in Malaysia—whether about national, regional or Islamic history—is primarily informative; it may heighten students' interest in their national, regional and Islamic heritage but can neither really inspire students with a sense of historical involvement nor imbue them with effective moral lessons.

There has, however, been one important development in Malaysian universities and teacher training colleges recently—the introduction of an Islamic Civilization course, which in the past was open only to students in the Islamic Studies. The course, designed by Zainal Abidin Hj. Abdul Kadir, who is the Director of the Division of Islamic Education in the Ministry of Education, is an attempt at 'the promotion of a united Malaysian society in the future'.²² But although this course holds tremendous potential for the articulation of a normative Islamic world-view and a critical assessment of Islamic history and institutions in relation to the world and Malaysia, it is apparently quite vague in its philosophy and objectives and therefore cannot be effectively implemented. At college and university levels the inclusion of Islamic Civilization as a compulsory subject for all students seems essential to inculcate the correct understanding that Islam is not merely a religion in the normal sense but also a culture and civilization that has played a major role in the Malay archipelago as described by al-Attas.²³ Being the religion of the Federation, it is important for all educated Malaysians to appreciate the historical and civilizational aspects of Islam. However, making it compulsory ensures that it is equivalent to the *fard ain* knowledge for Muslims, which, at the higher education level, means the quest for a more critical, coherent and integrated world-view. But the contents of this course are basically informative with a tinge of apologetics.

All Malaysian higher educational institutions have been offering the Islamic Civilization course, with different contents and degrees of emphasis, since 1983 with the exception of MARA Institute of Technology (ITM) which started in 1977. All students in Teacher Training Colleges, the National University, the University of Technology and the University of Northern Malaysia have to pass the course; at the University of Science it is compulsory for Muslim students only, but they are not required to pass it. The University of Malaya and the University of Agriculture prefer to offer it as an elective subject. Most institutions complain of inadequate staffing and lack of reference materials.

A critical evaluation of the course at the National University by the Coordinator for the Centre for General Studies, which co-ordinates the Islamic Civilization course, has underlined some major organizational problems. Because this course does not have its own staff, the workload is shared by about forty different lecturers from all faculties who teach one lecture-unit repeated to four or five different groups in a semester, many of whom do not, naturally, regard this as their real task. The incidence of lecturers requesting last-minute absences coupled with the difficulty of finding suitable replacements is common. There are also complaints that attendance is low because students can pass the test by using the multiple choice questions of previous exams.

Islamic Courses at Colleges and Universities

There are twenty-four teacher training colleges in Malaysia, three of which are located in Sabah and four in Sarawak. In addition, there are four colleges specializing in specific subjects, namely the Language Institute, the Specialist Teacher Training College, the Islamic Teacher Training College, and the Technical Teacher Training College. The training of graduate teachers is done in all universities except the University of Northern Malaysia and MARA Institute of Technology. The state of teacher education, like everything else in Malaysia, is basically governed by considerations of national manpower and unity with Western orientations.³⁴

Besides the compulsory subject of Islamic Civilization (for all students), and Islamic Religious Instruction (for Muslim students) and Moral Education (for non-Muslims), there are no other formal programmes in teacher training colleges that include the Islamic perspective. The curriculum of all teacher training colleges in

Malaysia is centrally prescribed by the Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education.³⁵ To be sure some principals and Islamic student associations do organize informal programmes known as 'Kelas Fard ain' to imbue students with a deeper Islamic awareness. At university level, apart from the varying status of the Islamic Civilization programme, there is a trend to accommodate the Islamic perspective on education. For example, in one of the required courses for the diploma in education at the National University three out of five prescribed textbooks have an Islamic approach. Other than these there are no references to Islam even where it would be relevant, albeit comparatively, such as in Measurement and Evaluation, Home Science, Comparative Education, Introductory Counselling, Education for National Development and Unity, Behaviour Modification Technique for Teachers, and Evaluation, Attitudes and Values. The Malaysian sources that are used are primarily either Malaysian education or official government reports or translations of Western works. The absence of reading materials and references from the rich Islamic intellectual heritage which are available in Malay and English translations is particularly inexplicable because all the lecturers at the Centre for Education, National University and most of the students are Muslims. Even though there are no official statistics, it is safe to say that the National University (with the exception of IIU and ITM which do not have diploma in education programmes anyway) contains the highest number of Muslim staff and students of any university in Malaysia. It is thus not surprising that teacher education in Malaysia, in the words of Professor Awang Had Salleh, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Northern Malaysia, 'is not seriously producing teachers who are not only having noble personalities but also having the missionary attitude of developing noble personalities among their students'.³⁶

Notes

1. Government of Malaysia, *Fifth Malaysian Plan*. Hereafter cited as FMP.
2. Government of Malaysia, *Mid-Term Review of Second Malaysia Plan*.
3. For an official statement on this crucial incident in modern Malaysia, see Government of Malaysia, *The May 13 Tragedy*. For other views on the causes and implications, see Slimming, *Malaysia*; Mahathir, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore: The Asia Pacific Press, 1970); and Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident*.
4. FMP; *Star*, 23 March 1987.
5. Mohammad, *An Introduction to the Constitution of Malaysia*.
6. For a good view of what has been done, and proposed to be done, see Syed

Hasan al-Atas, *Penerapan Nilai-Nilai Islam*. Also see Malaysia, *Panduan Rancangan*.

7. This statement was made after searching through all the four earlier Malaysian Five-Year Plans where there was no reference whatsoever to the importance of spiritual values in the total Malaysian national development. However, this does not mean that previous leaders did not address the importance of religion in Malaysian life; they certainly did, but most often on specific religious occasions such as the Quran Reading Competition, The Prophet's Birthday, etc.

8. FMP, pp. vi, 30.

9. Letter from the publisher, *Arabia*, November 1986.

10. al-Attas, ed., *Aims and Objectives, of Islamic Education* pp. 158-9 (emphasis mine).

11. This is inspired by the seminal works of Bloom and colleagues, Derr and al-Shaybani. See Bloom, ed., *A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*; Krathwohl, et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*; Derr, *A Taxonomy of Social Purposes of Public Schools*; and al-Shaybani, *Falsafa al-Tarbiyya*.

12. Ministry of Education, *The Philosophy of Teacher Education in Malaysia*, p. 5.

13. Ministry of Education, *The Philosophy of Teacher Education*, pp. 36-7; also *Education in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1985, pp. 12-13.

14. See the aims and objectives of this subject as stated in the Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, *Sukatan Pelajaran Sekolah Menengah (Bantuan Kerajaan) Agama Islam*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.

15. Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, *Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Islam Sekolah Menengah*, 1987, p. 3. Mimeographed.

16. Ainuddin Bin Abdul Wahid, 'Sains, Teknologi dan Penghayatan Islam Dalam Pembangunan Generasi Muslim Malaysia Hari Ini. Kajian Khusus: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia', paper presented at *Islam in ASEAN's Institutions of Higher Learning*, National University of Malaysia, 2-5 December 1978, p. 4.

17. Ronald Dore, *The Diploma Disease*.

18. Chejne, *Ibn Hazm*, p. 208.

19. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology*.

20. *Utusan Malaysia*, 18 August 1986, and *New Straits Times*, 20 March 1987.

21. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*.

22. Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, *Minit Mesyuarat Mengenai Penilaian Semula dan Penyelarasan Kursus Tamadun Islam di Institut Pengajian Tinggi Tempatan*, Kuala Lumpur, 11 August 1986. Typewritten.

23. al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*.

24. *Philosophy of Teacher Education in Malaysia*, pp. 40-5.

25. For a brief but informative description of teacher training curriculum, see Ministry of Education, *Malaysian Country Paper: Development of Education 1981-1983*, prepared for the 39th Session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva, 1984, pp. 20-5.

26. Awang Had Salleh, 'Masa Depan Pendidikan Perguruan Penuh Cabaran', *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 October 1986.

6

Conclusion

The concept of knowledge is an important aspect of the Islamic world-view, which in summary, is basically founded on, and pervaded by five fundamental ideas. The idea of one living, omnipotent, omniscient, merciful yet just God; the idea of man's destiny as His servant and His vicegerent on earth and who is endowed with freedom and consequent responsibility; the idea of prophethood whose *raison d'être* is the guidance of man for optimal realization of his said destiny; the idea of multi-faceted reality and diversity of life which is a manifestation (*ayat*) of God and which is intended to benefit man in his quest for a meaningful existence; and the idea of eschatological judgment entailing reward or punishment.

This world-view naturally affects the approach to Islamic epistemology and has multiple implications for education. Briefly, the concept of knowledge in Islam has several key features. Knowledge is infinite since it originates from and ends in God, who is the Absolute Knower. Since knowledge is an aspect of divinity, seeking it, expanding and teaching it are considered important acts of divine worship. The proper and sincere application of knowledge in one's personal and collective life forms the foundation of the only criterion of human excellence in Islam, *taqwa* or, as it is described in other places, *khashya*. The concept of knowledge is thus an integrated one; whether in its sources where the revealed and primary sources (the Quran and the normative *Sunna* of Muhammad) as well as those found in nature,

history and the inner experiences of man, or in its effect where it produces spiritual enlightenment and good action resulting in true justice, the closest attribute of *taqwa*. The teachings found in these two primary sources of Islamic epistemology provide the stability and paradigm to deal with all the changes in human lives and environment. At the same time, different inner experiences, history and natural phenomena provide avenues for a new interpretation of the teachings of the basic sources of Islam. The greatest challenge for the Muslims remains that of properly understanding the general élan of the Quran and the authentic *Sunna* of Muhammad as well as the proper meanings in the continuous unfolding of the secrets of natural, historical and psychological phenomena. This requires a concept of life-long education, not only as a professional obligation but, more importantly, as a religious virtue. A *mullaqi* (a godly person) is one in whom are found all the attributes of a knowledgeable servant and a responsible and just vicegerent of God on earth thereby fulfilling the purpose of man's creation. This process can be achieved only through the concept and practice of education as never ending and comprehensive. And since the responsibility for education is an obligation for all Muslims, and the opportunity is theoretically and practically open to all, Islam would benefit most from the democratization of education and would be extremely adaptable to modernity, as Ernest Gellner aptly observes.¹

The educational implications of this concept of knowledge and the world-view it represents are far-reaching, but its formulation must be effected in a specific historical context unless it is to become a utopian academic exercise. As J. S. Furnivall states in a discussion on educational aims and policy: 'The people perish where there is no vision, but a ladder leading up to the sky is of no use unless it starts from earth.'² Hence there is a need to think out the educational implications within the context and existing realities of a modern nation-state, as I have attempted to do for Malaysia in this book.

One of the most important realities in Malaysia is the highly plural nature of its society. Any reform or change in one part of a society must take into consideration its possible impact on other communities. This fact becomes more critical when the Muslim population is just a little more than half of the entire population, whose educated group and leaders as a whole are more exposed to modern western ideas and cultural elements than to Islam. Thus, the process of Islamization has caused some concern among non-Muslims.³ The first prime minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who writes

regularly in the English-language, Chinese-owned daily newspaper, *The Star*, has expressed his fear concerning Islamization numerous times. His latest statement on this theme is ironic in the light of the recent election of the leaders of UMNO (United Malay National Organization), the strongest group in the ruling coalition government, where four out of five top leaders have either an Islamic religious educational background or Islam-oriented vision. Additionally, the highest vote-getter in the UMNO Supreme Council was the former Dean of Faculty of Islamic Studies at the National University of Malaysia, who has a doctorate in Islamic Studies from an Egyptian University. The Tunku cautions that '... experience has shown that too much emphasis on religion will lead to misunderstanding as Malaysia is a country of mixed population and mixed religions, and would not be congenial to the happy relationship that exists among the people today.'⁴ In 1982, he wrote reminding UMNO leadership that: 'It would be a sad day indeed, if the government is pressured into introducing drastic reforms to keep up with religious [Islamic] laws. It must be remembered that the constitution proclaimed Malaysia as a secular state in which Islam is declared the official religion.'⁵

The government under Dr Mahathir Muhammad seems to be very aware of the delicate nature of the Malaysian socio-political situation. He emphasized moderation in his foreword to the Fifth Malaysia Plan, and in his official opening address of the first Islamic Bank of Malaysia on 1 July 1983 he said, 'We do not intend to abolish other banks because not all the population in this country are Muslims; also the commercial banking currently in vogue today is used worldwide. ... Islamic Banks can be used to conduct business transactions, but other banks are needed.'⁶ It must be noted that this policy of cautious Islamization by the government has been popular with the people judging by their response to its programmes and projects, such as the Inculcation of Islamic Values in Government Bureaucracy, Islamic Banks, Islamic *Takaful* (Insurance) and others. However, they are rejected by some Islamic groups particularly the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), the United Kingdom-based Islamic Representative Council (IRC) and Suara al-Islam (the Voice of Islam), and the Malaysian Islamic Study Group based in the United States, MISG-USA.

PAS is a national political party formed in the 1940s with grassroot rural support and traditional Islamic ideology based on Shafite jurisprudence. But IRC, Suara al-Islam and MISG-USA are basically fundamentalist student bodies that were formed in the early 1970s.

They rely on the Quran, *hadith* and the (translated) writings of Ibn Taimiyya and current fundamentalist writers from the Middle East and Indo-Pakistan. Their positions on government Islamization policies are basically similar. IRC, in its journal *Furqan* (The Criterion), had a cover issue entitled, 'Islamization: A Tool To Perpetuate Jahili [unislamic] Ideology', while in its weekly newspaper, *Peristiwa* (Events) there was an article 'Islamisasi-Satu Kekeliruan' (Islamization: A Confusion).⁷ Suara al-Islam holds the view that the government is introducing only minor aspects of Islam that will not change the fundamental structure and basis of its ideology of liberalism and economic development. According to them, the Islamization programmes are nothing but a strategy to confuse the Muslims into thinking that the government is the real champion of Islam.⁸

Similarly, PAS has said that more and more people are becoming aware of the true teachings of Islam and therefore UMNO's nationalist and secular government is forced to think about strategies to confuse the people by wearing the Islamic robe, at least to convince them that UMNO won't be left behind in implementing Islam. But these programmes cannot dismantle the basic foundation of this nationalist, secular and democratic government. They also cannot be called Islamization.⁹ PAS is convinced that Islamization in many Muslim nations today is an attempt to continue in power as advised by the United States. It alleges that a document was found in the US Embassy in Iran which was taken over by Muslim students in 1979 advising the Shah to carry out certain Islamic programmes.¹⁰ These groups will not accept anything short of a total Islamic state. The citation of the plural nature of Malaysian society is seen only as an excuse for not wanting to implement total Islam.¹¹ As one student leader wrote: 'It is impossible that UMNO can, or will struggle for Islam. In fact, UMNO's suppression of Islam resurgence is nothing new.'¹²

The India-based group, Tabligh-i-Jamaat is apolitical and does not consider such matters relevant to its cause. One Malaysian leader of the group told me in Ames, Iowa, in the Summer of 1982, 'All the [political, economic, interracial and other] problems that we are facing would be settled if the Muslims have Iman [faith].' Therefore, their main concentration is on strengthening their faith by praying, *dhikrullah* (mentioning the names and attributes of God), performing and perfecting the rituals and travelling and inviting people to these tasks. Darul Arqam, whether in its monthly newspapers *al-Arqam*,

al-Mukminah (for women), *al-Munir* (for children and teenagers) or in the booklets written by its founder and leader, does not comment directly on government activities. Yet with its feverish economic, social and educational as well as literary activities, it is safe to say that it does not take seriously the government's Islamization efforts.¹³

ABIM seems to be the only credible and popular non-governmental Islamic body that has a critical appreciation of the governmental Islamization policy. ABIM is ready to work with any group in areas that will be of benefit to Islam and its *umma* on the Quranic principle of co-operation in righteousness. Even though its ultimate goal is total Islamization, it nevertheless 'welcomes any efforts and projects beneficial to the Muslims such as the Islamic University and Islamic Bank if they are conducted in the manner acceptable to the *umma*'.¹⁴

ABIM would agree on the importance of the plural nature of Malaysia and the possibility of the oppressive nature of a religious state, and that abuse in the name of religion has often occurred in human experience. But it also points out that in much of Islamic history it was the true religious experience that was instrumental in minimizing much suffering. Actually, Islam has historically operated largely in a heterogeneous society. Muslim cities like Damascus and Baghdad in the eighth century CE, for example, became centres of plural societies where Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Indians, Copts, Berbers, Sogdians, Turks, and even Chinese had different religious affiliations such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Manicheanism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, many of which have positively contributed to the flowering of the Islamic civilization. The success of historical Islam in dealing with race-consciousness has been universally accepted. To the Muslims, the plural nature is not an obstacle but rather a challenge to realize the universal mission of Islam for the benefit of the socio-moral order that Muslims have built which could overflow to all other communities.

A big obstacle in the task of the current moderate Islamization process is the lack of good reading materials—whether for policy-makers, bureaucrats, politicians, professionals or educational institutions—that would provide sophisticated and coherent Islamic responses to the modern Malaysian issues. Most reading materials on Islam do not come from Malaysia; they come from the United Kingdom, the United States, the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, Singapore and Indonesia. Indonesian scholars have translated works primarily from Arabic, English and French sources into the Indonesian language which Malaysians can read. The Malaysian public, especially

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the younger generation, seems to be fascinated with the fundamentalist interpretations particularly of the Middle Eastern al-Ikhwan-Muslimun and Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami. However, the works of the late Ismail al-Faruqi, Fazlur Rahman, Sayyid Muhammad al-Naqib al-Attas, Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Muhammad Iqbal are popular among some Muslim intellectuals, particularly the western-educated members of ABIM. Discussions on the educational implications of the Islamic concept of knowledge are conducted wholly within the parameters of the government's official educational system for obvious reasons. There were however, in 1985, 403 private schools in Malaysia with 132,490 students and 5,105 teachers, excluding those in the kindergarten. Most of these schools are catering for drop-outs from the government schools, and are intended primarily as channels to provide them with another chance for re-entering government higher institutions, or to provide diploma programmes in certain commercial and technical fields.

There are, besides, the people's religious primary and secondary schools (*Sekolah Agama Rakyat*) with their own Arabic-Islamic curriculum whose graduates either become imams of local mosques or enter Middle Eastern and Indo-Pakistan Islamic institutions of higher learning particularly in Cairo (Egypt), Medina (Saudi Arabia), Deoband and Lucknow (India). Many of these religious schools are slowly being taken over by, and absorbed into, the mainstream of the Malaysian educational system with more modern subjects and outlook on offer while their religious emphasis is retained. The Council of Rulers has recently established the Advisory Council for the Standardization of Islamic Instruction and Education to standardize the syllabi and curriculum of all the people's and state religious schools that are not under the Ministry of Education. There are 1,246 schools with 210,000 students involved in the two types of administrations. The very traditional religious schools, or *pondok* (literally 'hut') or *pesantren* in Indonesia are slowly dying away, appealing only to the aging generation.

The concept of Islam and its integrated concept of knowledge is generally accepted in Malaysia today as has been described in chapter 5. Many prominent Muslim intellectuals and groups both within and outside the government have been calling on the government to implement some of these implications. Dr Mahathir Muhammad's government has responded positively but understandably cautiously, and certain things have been achieved.¹⁵ Yet there seems to be a lack of coherency and systematic thought even among Muslim intellectuals themselves in this initial stage of this endeavour.

Conceptually it is suggested here that dichotomy (or trichotomy) between the formal and the informal (and non-formal) aspects of education must be immediately rejected for it has many negative implications for the nature and function of education and educational accountability. Since most Islamic activities in education, whether in schools or teacher training colleges, is done outside the formal context of the respective curricula, and since performance or involvement in these activities is not accorded the same recognition as those that are examined, no students, teachers or parents want to continue these programmes if they conflict with preparations for examination subjects. Thus reductionist methods of evaluating the performance of students, teachers and schools through academic examinations needs to be critically re-examined; especially those fields that are located outside the parameters of *fard ain* category. The academic bias must be changed because contribution to society is not limited to those who excel in academic works only. Rather, society needs capable and moral traders, craftsmen, soldiers, agriculturalists, fishermen, etc., who may not have high paper qualifications but who do possess the basic thinking and learning skills.

Fard ain knowledge must be deeply understood and ably practised. Thus it is strongly recommended that the teaching of Islamic Religious Knowledge to Muslim students be made obligatory through all educational levels including Form Six and university, and that the integrated performance of the student must be formally stated in the Educational Act. The present system of not requiring examinations will not serve the intended purpose. Examination in the context of an integrated philosophy of Islam, should include written, oral and practical aspects, and Muslim students should be orally examined to see if they can read the Quran, say specific prayers properly and understand certain basic concepts and principles of Islam.

The Moral Education that is obligatory for non-Muslims just as Islamic instruction is for Muslims, should also be seriously conducted, and the students' performances evaluated for the moral problems and immaturity of any one group will affect others in the country. But Moral Education which seeks to instil, for example, the virtues of sacrifice, tolerance, commitment, patience, true courage, justice, etc., can be effective only when it takes a religious value and meaning. Therefore it might be a good idea, and certainly in accord with the Islamic notion of non-Muslim rights, that Moral Education be based on the religion of the respective groups.

At university level, the Islamic Civilization programme needs to be

coherently and systematically organized so that students can have a critical appreciation of normative Islam and its historical achievement and shortcomings. However this programme does not carry the status of *fard ain* knowledge, which is most aptly deserved by the Fundamental Studies programme of the International Islamic University (IIU) whose components include the *aqida* (creed or world-view), *akhlaq* (ethical philosophy and practice) and *sharia* (law). It also contains regular practical religious exercise and training. One possible flaw in this programme is the lack of Islamic hermeneutics courses in its syllabus which would prepare its students to use systematically and coherently the basic sources of Islam and other epistemological devices acceptable to its *elan* to guide them in their professional and private affairs. Even though the IIU is officially outside the Malaysian educational system, the lecturers and students are largely Malaysian and it could form the basis for a truly Islamic educational system in Malaysia. It is to be hoped that its overwhelming percentage of Malaysian staff and students will positively and creatively contribute to the progressive Islamic developments in Malaysia.

The Islamization policy in Malaysia, according to Mr Anwar Ibrahim, Education Minister and a vice-president of the ruling party UMNO, should not be an exclusivist policy particularly *vis-à-vis* the West. It is indeed an injustice to history and to the true spirit of Islam that some Muslim activists (and many Western scholars also) equate Islamization with an anti-West philosophy. Muslims are urged in the Quran to benefit from the signs of God in *all* parts of the world; and learning from the West, whose rise to prominence can be attributed significantly to its contact with the Muslim world, should be positively regarded as a reciprocation of a magnificently creative process. Islam's civilizational greatness, though inspired by its integrated and coherent world-view, did not grow in a vacuum. Rather, it benefited greatly from the rich and varied achievements of previous and contemporary non-Muslim civilizations. Malaysia's process of Islamization by the government is conducted in this spirit. Indeed, its policy of looking East is not an attempt to reject the West but to see how some eastern nations like Japan and South Korea have become respected and prosperous nations by learning from the West while simultaneously utilizing and maintaining their cultural and social values and heritage. In Mr Anwar Ibrahim's words, 'looking East is neither an obsession with the East nor a hysteria against the West.'¹⁶

It is to be hoped that Malaysia gets the balance right, and that an

Islamization programme can be successfully pursued without the true spirit of Islam being lost.

Notes

1. Gellner, *Muslim Society*.
2. Furnivall, *Educational Progress in Southeast Asia*, p. 5.
3. See, for example, an undated booklet, *Islamization of Malaysian Laws*, by the Catholic Research Centre (Kuala Lumpur: Catholic Research Centre, n.d.), which is a strong critique on the recent call by ABIM for the Islamization of Malaysian laws and the general Islamization policy of the government. It is indubitably an attempt to arouse fears among non-Muslims about the well-intentioned policy.
4. *Star*, 28 April 1987.
5. *Star*, 18 October 1982.
6. Cited from *Peristiwa*, February 1984, p. 3. *Peristiwa* (Events) is a newspaper of the Islamic Representative Council, an influential Malaysia Islamic study group based in Birmingham, England.
7. *Furqan*, September-December 1983; and *Peristiwa*, February 1984, pp. 3, 12.
8. 'A Muslim Critique on the Malaysian Education System', *Suara Islam*, March-April 1984, pp. 13-15.
9. 'Bank Islam: Mahathir keliru atau memutar-belitkan hakikat riba', *Al-Harakah* (For Members Only), 1(2)1 Dzulkaidah, 1403 AH/1983, 1, 5, 6. It is a weekly magazine of PAS only recently (1987) given a permit for popular circulation.
10. 'Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam Didalangi Imperialis Amerika', *Harakah*, 22 May 1987.
11. 'Islamisasi—Satu Kekeliruan', *Peristiwa*, February 1984, p. 3.
12. A letter from Mr Rozhan Othman, President MISG-USA, dated 19 July 1984.
13. It must be stated that of all Islamic groups and associations—government-owned or otherwise—Darul Arqam's magazines are the most attractively written, best produced and most aggressively sold.
14. Siddiq Fadi, *Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Perjuangan*, keynote address at ABIM's 11th Annual convention at Petaling Jaya, 3-5 September 1982, pp. 31-2.
15. See Simon Barraclough, 'Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revival in Malaysia: A Regime Perspective', *Asian Survey*, 23, August 1983, 958-75.
16. Interview with the Minister of Education, Mr Anwar Ibrahim, in his office, 7 May 1987.

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Education in Muslim countries has for too long followed the secular philosophy of the developed world, but now Islamic revivalism is demanding an educational system that conforms to the teachings of Islam. This book systematically formulates an educational worldview of Islam by returning to the two fundamental sources: the Quran and the Sunnah. It discusses the concepts that make up this worldview — God, prophethood, man, the universe — and the relationship of knowledge to wisdom, truth, spirituality, ethics and action.

Moving in the final two chapters from the theoretical to the practical, the author examines the implications for one developing Islamic country — Malaysia. He looks at the socio-political background, the attempts at Islamization, the educational aims, the methodology and the contents of education. And he clearly notes where Malaysia is at this point. His investigation will be invaluable to all other countries who need to define their own roles and concepts of knowledge.

Dr Nor Wan Daud is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University, Malaysia. The author of a number of articles on subjects ranging from democracy to drug abuse, his first book, *Learning Culture: Its Concept, Requirements and Implementation in Malaysia*, was published in 1988.
